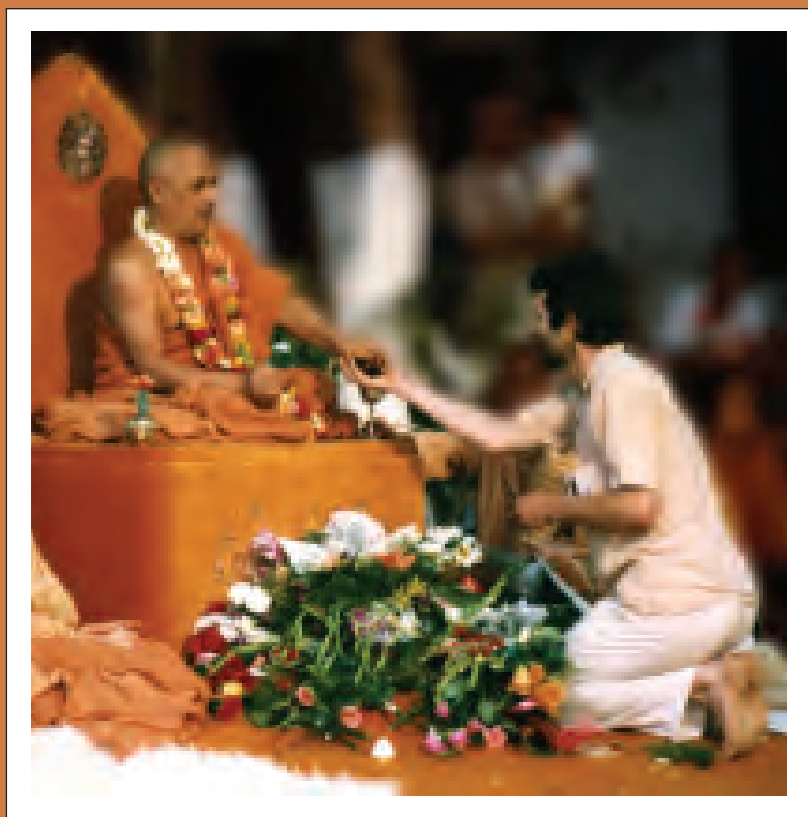


2013 Golden Jubilee edition

BIHAR YOGA®

Karma Sannyasa

Swami Satyasangananda Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

Karma Sannyasa



1963–2013
GOLDEN JUBILEE

WORLD YOGA CONVENTION 2013
GANGA DARSHAN, MUNGER, BIHAR, INDIA
23rd–27th October 2013

Karma Sannyasa

Spiritual Life for the Householder

Swami Satyasangananda

Under the Guidance of
Swami Satyananda Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

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Published by Bihar School of Yoga
First published 1984

Published by Yoga Publications Trust
Reprinted 2001, 2006, 2009, 2013

ISBN: 978-81-85787-43-5

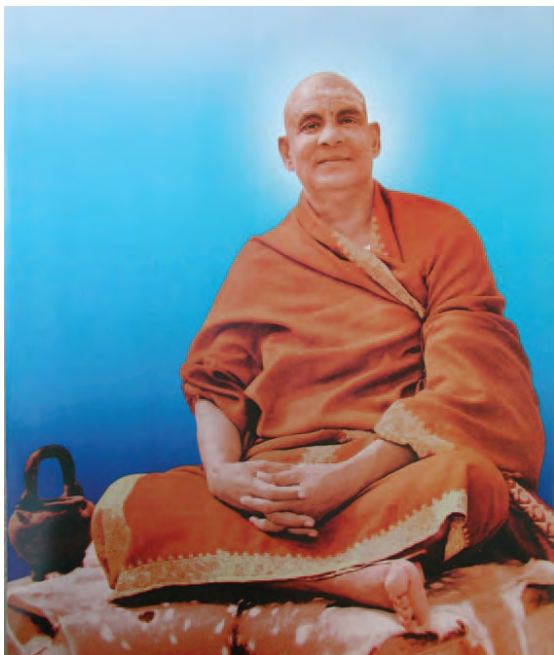
Publisher and distributor: Yoga Publications Trust, Ganga Darshan,
Munger, Bihar, India.

Website: www.biharyoga.net
www.rikhiapeeth.net

Printed at Thomson Press (India) Limited, New Delhi, 110001

*Neither husband nor children
Nor responsibilities are obstructions;
On the contrary, they are helpful.
If you have in you extreme intensity,
Real love, indomitable will
And a deep thirst for knowledge,
There is no power on earth
Which can cause hindrance on this path.
A wife can continue to be a wife and mother,
A butcher can remain a butcher
And a fisherman a fisherman.
No one need change their status
Or vocation in life, nor their duties.
All that is necessary is that they perform
Their sadhana in order to awaken
The secret power of yoga which is within,
And to make every action an act of sadhana.*

Swami Satyananda Saraswati



Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*

Contents

Introduction	1
Part One	
An Age Old Tradition	11
Why Karma Sannyasa?	16
The Final Destination	20
All the World's a Stage	25
Karma	31
Life Has to be Lived	35
What is Detachment?	39
Qualifications	43
Is Religion a Barrier?	46
Relevance of Ashram Life	48
The Guru Factor	53
Initiation	58
Sadhana	62
Swadhyaya	68
The Great Sage King Janaka	72
The Primal Instinct	77
Is Celibacy Necessary?	83
Family Life	89
Children	94
Diet	98
Wealth	102
Epilogue	105

Part Two – Talks given by Swami Satyananda Saraswati

A New Outlook on Life	113
Crossing the Threshold	123
The Tiger and the Sheep	129
The Blossoming of Spiritual Awareness	136
Initiation Day	146
The Three Keys	153
The Inner Veil	160
Ancient Tradition of Rishis	165
Intensity of Attachment	179
Real Detachment	189
Family Relationships	195
Let Your Children Grow	203
Brahmacharya	213
Lotuses in Water	222
Finding the Balance	224
Glimpse into Yoga Vashishtha	228
Karma	233
Philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita	243
Self-Respect and Sadhana	250
Inner Transformation	256
Centres of Knowledge and Light	263
Stages of Sannyasa	273
Sannyasa and Karma Sannyasa	276

Appendices

A. The Yoga of Renunciation in Action (Fifth Chapter of the <i>Bhagavad Gita</i>)	285
B. Yajnavalkya-Maitreyi Dialogue (Excerpt from the <i>Brihadaranyaka Upanishad</i>)	289

Glossary	291
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Index	297
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Introduction

“I have come a long way to speak to you,” the newcomer said. He was an artist, a painter. He had long hair and delicate hands. Although he spoke slowly and carefully, measuring every word, there was a note of restlessness in his voice. There were several other people in the room. They had come to carry on a conversation started a few days earlier on the meaning and purpose of life. The artist was a newcomer and he had come alone. With a slight hesitation, he began to speak.

“In my life there has been the normal share of ups and downs. I have participated fully in every sphere of life and really I have no reason to complain. But, nevertheless, I feel that there is something that I have missed out on. I have begun to question my existence and my relationship with others. I feel an inadequacy of purpose in my life. I have often contemplated sannyasa, but I have a family to look after. I am not yet free of that responsibility, yet, at the same time, I wish to give my life a new impetus, a new direction and a new goal.

“I would like to embark on a spiritual quest, but as a married man with obligations and responsibilities, it seems that all the doors are closed to me. Or is there a way out? You see, if this realization had dawned on me earlier, I would not have burdened myself with family and social commitments. But is it too late now? Where can I start?”

He paused, searching for an answer. He looked young in years, and was dressed simply with an air of casualness. Swamiji looked directly at him and replied, "There is a solution to every problem. We have only to find a way out. You see, man is born, he grows into an adult, gets married, earns a living, grows old and dies. This is what is happening everywhere. But can we believe that this is the sole purpose for which we live?"

"Of course, there are many important factors which determine one's life. You are born with certain karmas and samskaras and have to work them out before you can proceed on your life's journey. But what is the use of working out one set of karma and, at the same time, building up another set to influence your future life?"

"Therefore, you have to approach life with great care, proper understanding and a desire to achieve a better quality of existence. I have met many people of your age, and also older, who were faced with the same problem. They wanted to improve the quality of their life. Many thought that sannyasa was the answer, but they were unable to adopt that way of life, for they were tied down by responsibilities which they had yet to work through. It seems pointless to abandon your responsibilities and then be ridden with guilt for the rest of your life."

Outside the sky was dense with clouds. It had rained the night before and the air was fragrant with the smell of the wet earth. Swamiji continued, "I feel that if you view life in the right perspective and make certain adjustments in your thinking, then you will find a solution to your problem. The problem you describe is actually simple. In fact, I even hesitate to call it a problem."

"Your thirst for the mundane experiences of life is more or less quenched. Your awareness is now growing to another dimension of experience. That experience is related to your evolvment – you may call it mental evolvment, spiritual evolvment or evolvment of consciousness. This has caused a restlessness in your being, for you are not able to adjust or

understand how to combine and synthesize your everyday life with a higher, more meaningful existence.

“I have given a great deal of thought to this problem. How is it possible to live the life of a householder and yet maintain a balance between one’s external and internal growth? It is for this reason that I have reinterpreted the vanaprastha ashrama and adapted it to suit the needs of modern men and women. In the olden days when a householder, or grihastha, felt the need to delve deeper into the mysteries of life, he undertook the vanaprastha ashrama, retiring to the forest with his wife to spend time in contemplation and inner reflection.

“The vanaprastha ashrama was devised by the saints and sages who could envisage that once man had exhausted his ambitions, passions and desires, he would undoubtedly turn inwards. If, at that time, he is not given the facility, guidance and encouragement to understand his life better, he will develop mental and physical problems, and thus become a hindrance to both himself and society.

“However, in today’s world, there are no forests in which to live, and it is not practical or even possible to create that situation. So I have introduced the concept of karma sannyasa based on the tradition of vanaprastha ashrama. Many people have already been initiated by me. They had similar problems to you, and were of all age groups, married and single. Karma sannyasa has worked very well. In fact, wherever I go there are many people who ask for karma sannyasa initiation.”

The artist, who had been listening intently to every word, asked Swamiji, “What is karma sannyasa and how do you become a karma sannyasin?”

Swamiji replied, “Karma sannyasa is ‘inaction in action’. This is the principal philosophy of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Krishna tells Arjuna there is no harm in action, the danger lies in attachment and dependence on the fruits of the actions you have performed. The wise man, even while acting in this world, is not interested in the fruits of his actions. The sense of doership, which gives rise to happiness and unhappiness, is

fictitious. “You are not the doer of any action,” he tells Arjuna, “so why do you assume doership?”; the *Gita* explains this concept.

“If you can understand this concept and implement it in your daily life, you will gradually have a higher quality of experience. That is essentially the philosophy of karma sannyasa. Live life fully, participate in all events externally, but internally maintain an attitude of non-doership. Do not become inactive, for you will gain nothing. What has to be done, has to be done. Even while doing the actions natural to you, you are truly the non-doer if you are unattached to them. On the other hand, if you are doing nothing and are attached to that non-doership, you become the doer.

“It is a very intricate philosophy and has to be understood in its true light. The change I am talking about is internal. Your external life goes on as it is. You live with your family, work, go on holidays, see movies. In fact, on the outside you should appear to be the same person. But internally you will have to do a lot of overhauling. All the changes that are taking place are within you, not outside. Of course, it does not happen overnight, it is a gradual process, but once you are able to grasp the significance of this idea in relation to your life and growth as an individual, you will find the answer to your problem.”

The artist remained silent, pondering deeply on what had been said. At that point a lady, who had been attending many satsangs, and was herself in search of a new way of life, asked Swamiji, “What is the necessity of initiation into karma sannyasa? If we are to maintain our external appearance, relationships and lifestyle as they are, is it not possible to achieve this inner attitude without being initiated into karma sannyasa?”

Swamiji paused for a while, looking out of the window. The clouds had burst into rain. Finally he said, “I was coming to that point. Of course, anyone who has this attitude towards life is a karma sannyasin, whether or not he is initiated. But how many are able to say that they are not involved in

their actions and can maintain a sense of detachment to the consequences of their actions, whether good or bad? Man is limited by his nature. He tries to overcome his limitations, but very often he fails in his attempt. On account of distractions, confusions in the mind and a flagging willpower, he is at a loss. So it is important for him to have a guru who, through the process of initiation, assumes the role of a guide in his life.

“Initiation is not just a mere ritual. It is the transference of the guru’s inspirational energy to the disciple. The disciple then draws on this energy to help him maintain one-pointedness and dedication in his efforts. The guru is there to administer guidance and inspiration, and to check where the disciple is going wrong.

“Karma sannyasa is more difficult to maintain than full sannyasa because at times it can be very difficult for the disciple to maintain a balance between worldly life and inner life. Sometimes one may lean too heavily towards the inner quest and overlook one’s duties towards the family; at other times one may get caught up in the maya of worldly life and its distractions, and one’s sadhana may suffer. A karma sannyasin has to be very careful on this point, and should strive to maintain a balance.

“On the one hand, you are a parent, a husband or wife, an employee, a member of society; on the other hand, you are a seeker of the self, pursuing the goal of truth. Both roles should be complementary and conducive to each other. Your performance and progress in spiritual life should enhance your worldly relationships and vice versa. Only then will you find fulfilment. That is why a guru and initiation are most important for a karma sannyasin, because it is the guru’s guidance that helps one to maintain balance and harmony in one’s external and internal life.”

The artist looked up at Swamiji with apprehension, a trifle hesitant, and said, “I have found a great deal of solace in what you have said. It has given me a new and exciting view of life. I feel now that there is a way for me, although I

am so enmeshed in the trammels of day to day life. What do I have to do to become a karma sannyasin?”

Swamiji replied, “Approach a guru who can give you initiation and a proper understanding of the life you are about to enter. He will give you a sadhana. In the course of time, this sadhana will give you the strength, clarity of mind and correct judgement that you require in your life. He will give you a geru dhoti, or piece of unstitched cloth, to wear at the time of sadhana as a symbol of your resolution.

“If you wish to receive a spiritual name, he can give you that too. A spiritual name is important, for it signifies that which is your real inner nature. The guru has a clear vision of your deeper nature, your karma, your past, present and future, and he gives you a name on that basis. It should be a constant reminder of your destination. Other than this, you continue to live as you have been living. Your relationship with your wife, the food you eat, your lifestyle, go on just as they are.”

The artist’s face lit up with a smile and he said, “I was under the impression that I would have to make many changes in my life. It has been most gratifying to speak with you, however; there is one last doubt I wish to clarify. What is the role of celibacy in the life of a karma sannyasin? Does one have to practise it?”

Swamiji closed his eyes for a brief moment and then looked up at him and replied, “According to the vedic tradition, the relationship between husband and wife forms part of their dharma or duty, and they are bound by it. Just as it is your dharma to serve your parents, in the same way it is your dharma to abide by the injunctions laid down in the Vedas regarding your relationship with your wife. To go against that would be to go against one’s dharma. Marital relations are not a sin, rather they are a stepping stone to higher evolution.

“Moreover, after being married for a number of years, I think both partners are more or less satiated. The passion/desire neurosis that is experienced before marriage is almost

exhausted. What remains is not craving and hankering, but an intimate relationship.

“Of course, the practice of celibacy cannot be underestimated, but it has to be spontaneous, authentic and free from suppression. If you find that it is not working, then your usual relationship should be resumed on the basis of the tantric tradition. The necessary practices for a successful, truthful and rewarding outcome should be learned from the guru. Both partners should do the practices and thus raise the awareness from the gross centres to the higher plane.

“The philosophy of karma sannyasa is very simple. Use your life as a householder for a higher purpose, not merely for eating, sleeping and procreating. In time this will produce good samskaras for you and your family, and pave the way for a higher incarnation in your next life. For samskaras, whether good or bad, are carried from life to life. So we have to be very careful about what samskaras we accumulate.”

The artist said thoughtfully, “My wife was unable to come here with me on account of the children. But she too may wish to join me in this initiation.”

Swamiji rose from his chair, as if to leave the room, and replied, “Wonderful! What could be better than both husband and wife dedicated to a higher quality of life, and deciding to tread the same path.”

Part One

An Age Old Tradition

The Indian mind has always aspired towards transcendence, or perfect liberation of the individual. In this respect, everything in life is considered a means and not an end in itself. Even religion is regarded as a means, which ultimately has to be transcended in order to reach the final goal of life.

This philosophy is parallel, in some ways, to the revelations of science. The mystical knowledge of matter which scientists offer us today often surpasses the range of our perception. Nevertheless, we are compelled to accept their proofs as valid because they have freed their minds from the trammels of personal opinions and judgements.

The freedom of spirit which a yogi aspires for is somewhat similar. It is beyond all personal limitations. It is pure truth, pure consciousness of being, where the dualities of life cease to exist. There is neither good nor bad, ugly nor beautiful, useful nor useless. The yogis, who can be termed as the scientists of the mind and consciousness, have ascertained that there is a state of being beyond the personal ego, where subject and object merge into one another in an experience of supreme union and bliss.

Today most of us live in the narrow realm of ego. We have desires, and while satiating them we sometimes realize that it is possible to broaden our awareness and improve the quality of our life through the annihilation of our ego.

We understand that in encompassing all individuals into our own being, we can attain a state of perfect oneness and harmony with the whole universe. This is the real purpose of religion. As science liberates personal knowledge into universal knowledge, religion liberates individual awareness into the universal dimension.

The yogis, however, have always claimed that there is an even higher state of consciousness which is totally unqualified and free from any moral, ethical or religious limitations. Towards the attainment of this goal, they devised a systematic approach which would enable men and women to develop themselves to perfection while working through the various stages of their lives.

Although human beings experience unlimited desires, ambitions and passions, which should not be denied, it is the soul or *atman* which has to be realized. We cannot regard an individual as just a citizen, a patriot, a father, a mother, an employee, or a member of society, but rather, we should consider the spirit as being the substratum of all the other roles one plays in life.

Therefore, the yogis and rishis of India devised the ashramas or stages of life, in order to facilitate a balanced and steady development of spiritual awareness right from birth up to the time of death. As the day is divided into morning, afternoon, evening and night, in the same way, the lifespan was divided into four parts, in consideration of the requirements and nature of each stage.

These four stages were known as ashramas. The word *ashrama* is derived from the root *shram*, which means, 'to labour'. The lifespan was viewed as a constant endeavour to perfect inner awareness through physical, mental and spiritual labour. That is the sole purpose for which we are born, and we should never forget that. Therefore, they classified life into four progressive stages of evolution.

The first twenty-five years were known as the brahmacharya ashrama. *Brahmacharya* literally means, 'one who is established in the awareness of Brahma, or the highest

awareness'. This was the period dedicated to higher learning and to acquiring the skills which would be necessary in later life. At the age of eight the child was sent to live in the gurukul, or guru's family. The training which he received there was both empirical and spiritual. He learned Sanskrit and the spiritual sciences as well as geography, mathematics, history, archery and methods of warfare.

During this period the student totally dedicated himself to learning and serving the guru. The guru, through his wisdom and experience, gave the student a firm base or foundation for life, whereby both enjoyment and renunciation could come later on with equal ease. The student was taught that life is a pilgrimage, with liberation as the final destination. And with this discipline and foundation, he always kept his direction in mind.

Once the individual is firmly grounded in right living, it is easy to sail through any situation in life. However, if the mind is not bound by certain disciplines from the beginning, there is no reason why it should comply later. Just as oil poured over fire makes the flames blaze even more wildly, so too the mind that has been subjected to intemperate conditions and indiscipline will blaze up even more fiercely. That is why it is so essential to habituate the mind right from the beginning.

At the age of twenty-five the individual left the gurukul, returned home, and entered the second stage of life, called grihastha ashrama. *Grihastha* literally means 'householder'. This stage covered another twenty-five years during which he married, worked and earned money, thereby expressing his passions, desires and ambitions. In this way he exhausted his individual karma, thus paving the way for the next stage.

At the age of fifty, having completed his household duties, the individual was then ready to enter the third stage of life, known as vanaprastha ashrama. *Vanaprastha* literally means, 'forest dweller', and this was the stage when both husband and wife, retired to the forest and lived in seclusion after fulfilling their karma of worldly or material life. There

they laboured and strove for internal growth, assessing and reassessing their life and their spiritual values.

Gradually, they developed a higher awareness and prepared themselves to enter the last stage of life, known as *sannyasa ashrama*. *Sannyasa* means 'total surrender or dedication', and in this context, the dedication was to spiritual growth and experience. It was a life of total renunciation and constant struggle to free the individual soul from the fetters which bind it to the world of the senses.

These four ashramas, or stages of life, were a systematic process which allowed man to express every facet of his personality, and to finally achieve the purpose for which he was born. However, the net of *maya* spins stronger and stronger webs to ensnare man. Most people get so caught up in delusions that they cease to view the situations in life as stepping stones to the highest states of awareness.

They seem to forget that enjoyment, sensual pleasures, wealth and property are to be experienced and enjoyed only in order to express one's karma. When that is done, the individual must transcend these gross and mundane desires and strive to attain higher and more lasting experiences. Instead he gets completely involved in his karma and thereby builds up more karma. Thus he is forever caught in the endless circle of life.

In order to overcome this, the scriptures of ancient India advised people to enjoy life while maintaining the spirit of detachment, and with the ultimate aim of transcending that enjoyment. It is up to the contemporary saints and sages to interpret the scriptures according to the needs of each successive generation. Swami Satyananda, one of the foremost spiritual masters of this age, has utilized this ancient tradition as the basis for *karma sannyasa*.

In the present age it has not been possible for the modern individual to develop his life according to the disciplines of the four ashramas. He has not been shown the way, due to the degeneration of society and religious institutions. Therefore, it is not possible for him to plunge into the third stage

of life, known as vanaprastha, or the life of seclusion and contemplation, when his worldly duties are finished.

There are still karmas and samskaras through which he is evolving. He has not had the firm grounding of the preliminary disciplines. He lives purely for the purpose of enjoyment and so has ceased to realize the true direction of his life. Therefore, the vanaprastha ashrama has been restructured and reoriented in such a way that the individual develops a higher awareness through life, and not away from it. His battleground is his life, and only when he has passed the test of life and understood its real purpose can he hope for greater fulfilment.

The karma sannyasin does not have to retire into seclusion, but remains in the stream of life. It is futile and absurd to abandon life without first comprehending the underlying karmas and samskaras which motivate it. Moreover, the karmas which an individual has been accumulating will follow him even to his abode of seclusion. They will haunt and torment him and, if he is unable to resist them, they will draw him back into the world.

Karma sannyasa, therefore, is a path of life which enables the individual to work through the karmas and samskaras without creating more. At the same time, it enables development and expression of the higher faculties and potentials inherent within.

Why Karma Sannyasa?

With birth, the physical body completes its evolution. In human beings, therefore, the predominant factor is not development of the physical body, but of the mind and consciousness. Evolution of the mind is a subtle process, verifiable only by the manifestation of the higher faculties inherent in man. The more these faculties are developed and expressed, the more spiritual one becomes.

Spirituality is not an externally imposed factor, but a direct consequence of the evolution of one's own mind and consciousness. At every moment of life, the mind and consciousness are evolving. This creates a higher awareness in us and we begin to seek a deeper and more meaningful purpose for existence. This higher awareness is related to spiritual growth and expression of atman, spirit or soul.

The animal incarnations are dominated by the instincts of self-preservation such as eating, sleeping and procreating. We rarely ever hear of a dog, cow or goat that was spiritual or attended satsangs! But as human beings, along with the instincts of self-preservation, there is another dimension to our personality which sets us apart from all other living beings, and that is the mind, consciousness, buddhi and atman. From that dimension, we are swept forward to the higher goal of self-realization.

Every human being possesses the baser emotions such as desire, ambition, hatred, anger, fear, jealousy, greed, etc.

But there are higher qualities too, which each of us possesses according to our level of evolution. These are related to the higher faculties and manifest as discrimination, dispassion, selflessness, concentration and intuition. As we grow in awareness, these qualities become more and more predominant in us, and the more the mind evolves in this direction, the more spiritual it becomes.

Spirituality begins when you have transcended the baser emotions to a large degree, and have developed the higher faculties. These exist in everyone, right from birth, but in most of us they remain dormant or severely neglected due to ignorance. Until these faculties become an integral part of our lives, we may consider ourselves no better than animals. It is only with the manifestation of this higher awareness that our human evolution has really begun. If you have arrived at this stage, and feel the need to develop this potential to its fullest degree, you should first be shown the way. You must know where to turn for the reinforcement and expression of your higher awareness, otherwise it will cause a lot of disharmony, imbalance and tension in your life.

There is another aspect which also has to be considered, as it goes hand in hand with the expression of your higher faculties – and that is the expression of your karma, desires, ambitions, passions and instinctive needs. These are as much a vital part of your personality as your spiritual needs. As long as they are strong, you have to fulfil them.

So, you must allow for the harmonious growth of both your external and internal personality. There should be an integration, a harmony between both aspects, not the growth and expression of one at the expense of the other. Therefore, the path of karma sannyasa has been formulated for those who have developed a higher awareness, but who are still immersed in duties and obligations relating to their karma. It gives you an opportunity to experience both dimensions of your personality.

Time and again you are told to be good, kind, charitable and compassionate. You want to be like this, but you are

not able to be because you have never been shown the way. Goodness and compassion should arise as a spontaneous expression of your personality, and not as the suppression of all your negativity due to the enforcement of certain rules and restrictions. You should be good on account of your understanding and correct judgement, not because you are afraid of being punished or locked up.

This can only happen, however, if the mind is evolved and spirituality is allowed to grow and express itself. This growth should be an active and dynamic part of your life. It should pervade every activity and not be confined to the few minutes that you sit for prayer or confess to God on account of your fear and awe. You are terrified of what will happen to you if you don't bargain with God. You feel that you must appease him with soft, sweet words, otherwise you will be doomed after death.

This whole philosophy is wrong. You should pray because it is an expression of your higher personality. You should meditate as an expression of the higher love and unity you feel within yourself for the whole of creation. Only then will you find fulfilment in prayer and meditation, not otherwise. But what happens is that you compartmentalize your life. You create barriers instead of allowing life to flow freely. You separate religion and spirituality from life, when it should blossom as a natural consequence of the life you have been living.

For this reason, karma sannyasa becomes necessary so that you can learn to expand and express your higher awareness while living in the world as an active participant. Spirituality has first to be learned and expressed in and through life, not away from it. Only then does life reveal its deeper secrets and mysteries, the ones that simply take your breath away.

In the famed epic, *The Bhagavad Gita*, which is a dialogue between two great warriors, Krishna and Arjuna, Krishna instructs his disciple Arjuna about the path to higher awareness. The scene is set on the battle field of Kurukshetra.

Hundreds of missiles are flying all over the place and even amidst the destruction of war, Krishna points out to Arjuna that one should always act on the basis of higher awareness, no matter what actions one is performing. The battlefield is as sacred as a temple or church. He chides Arjuna and says that, only when one has learned to act with equanimity, discrimination and correct judgement, while facing the greatest turbulences in life, can one come to terms with spirituality.

Do not, for a moment, think that by negating life you can ever become spiritual. No, life is the battleground, the Kurukshetra, for each one of you, and it is up to you to decide which direction your life is going to take.

The Final Destination

One day, two friends decided to journey to India in search of spiritual knowledge. They had long been searching for a higher meaning to existence and, unable to grasp any purpose, had decided to look elsewhere. After reading about India's diverse culture and tradition, they had a deep feeling that amidst all of its mysteries they would find a solution to the question of how to reach the ultimate goal of life.

They finalized their plans and set out on their journey. At the first transit stop, they got off the plane to see what the place had to offer. It was a beautiful city, exciting, full of adventure, and one of them said to the other, "Hey, why don't we stop here for a few days; we can enjoy this place and then go on to India." Although the other friend was reluctant, he finally relented and they looked for a place to stay.

During those few days, they made friends who showed them around and, when it was time to leave, enticed them to stay a little longer. As a result, what was meant to be just a transit halt of only a few days turned out to be the final destination. Gradually, they developed relationships, got married, secured wealth and status, and sank into all the trappings of luxuries and comforts. These bonds became stronger and tighter, until finally they grew deaf and insensitive to the stirrings of the spirit, which had earlier urged them to travel to India.

Life went on, more attachments and bonds developed, and they began to mistake them for the ideals which they had earlier sought to fulfil. But ultimately the perplexities of life began to confront them, and what had been a pleasant situation transformed itself into a nightmare. Disillusionment, frustration and purposelessness began to creep in once again, and life began to seem futile.

By now, many years had passed and the bonds had penetrated deep into their minds, so naturally the resulting disillusionment caused a lot of pain. The doubts and questions which had been temporarily suffocated, once again began to emerge and devour them. They felt confused, dissipated and distressed; a normal reaction. This is what happens to most of us in life. We are all caught in the trammels of family, wealth, status and fame, and at some time or other they overpower us and begin to dominate our lives. Then we begin to feel bound by chains, suffocated by obligations and desperate to find a way out.

Now we come to the most interesting part of the story, that is, the repercussions this situation had on those two individuals. While one man totally succumbed to the attachments and became wholly dependent on them for his sustenance, the other reacted differently. He had all along regarded the whole event as but a trifling moment in life's journey. It was a game he was playing, in which he was the master and not the slave.

Although he participated in all the enjoyments which he derived from that situation, he remained aloof from the seductive spells it could easily have cast upon him. He did not become hypnotized by the glamour and charm of what life had been gracious enough to offer him. He realized that, in the final analysis, it was but a momentary experience and, when it ceased, he must move on to his final destination.

Therefore, when the unavoidable traumas and crises began to affect them, he was able to extricate himself from the situation without any serious setback to his personality, his mind and his life. The other man, however, who had

mistaken a mere distraction for his final destination, was irreparably affected. He was completely shattered and could not regain his balance. He developed psychosis, neurosis, schizophrenia and attempted to commit suicide. He could not cope.

The first was a karma sannyasin and the latter an average person. So the point arises, which do you want to be? Do you want to allow the cruelties and adversities of life to shatter and cripple you, or do you want to be equipped to face any situation in life?

The second man was at first completely intoxicated by his good fortune and, when it deserted him, his intoxication boomeranged into a disastrous disenchantment with life. Like a pendulum, he was left swinging from feelings of extreme happiness to sordid gloom. In actual fact, he could not handle any experience, pleasant or unpleasant. In both situations he was the slave, the servant, dancing to the tune of destiny.

However, the other man, the karma sannyasin, faced both situations with the same unruffled ease and equanimity. In happiness he was equipoised, and in unhappiness too he retained his balance. Destiny could not shake his firm foundation; he remained the master in both situations and emerged the winner, the conqueror.

The important decision you have to make for yourself is whether you wish to remain the slave, tossed back and forth in the restless ocean of life, or to become the master, the architect of your life. If you want to rule over the events of your life, then you have to find a philosophy and a goal for yourself which will constantly serve as a reminder of your ultimate destination.

Your destination lies elsewhere, but you mistake the events of life to be your final goal. No doubt these events have an important part to play in your life's journey. They will teach you many things, but they are only purposeful if they serve as a reminder and strengthen your determination to reach your final abode. If they do not, then they have defeated the

purpose for which they have been created and cease to be meaningful.

On a holiday, you enjoy the comforts of a good hotel and use its facilities to the maximum, but when you return to your home, it does not cause you any pain, discomfort or sorrow. In the same way, all the experiences in life, pleasant and unpleasant, are, in a sense, stepping stones or hurdles which you have to cross on the path to your final destination.

It is only when you begin to consider those events as the final culmination of your life that you become lost in your journey. You mistake those events for the real thing. You have misconceived notions that everything about you is permanent. Impermanence is a harsh reality, but in your intoxication with life, you delude yourself that death can only attack your neighbour and not yourself.

One day a minister in the court of King Janaka, who was a great sage in his time, asked the king, "What, in your opinion, is the greatest wonder of the world?" The king laughed and said, "Why, to me the greatest wonder is that every day thousands of people die around the world and, in spite of this, each one of us thinks that he alone is immortal!"

This is true. You understand the transience of life, yet you studiously ignore it, and when difficulties and disasters knock on your door, you are not equipped to meet the situation. Like an ostrich, you bury your head in the sand and hope it will pass away. There is little use in ignoring the lessons which life is trying to teach you time and time again, by burying your head in the sand. There is also little point in abandoning your duties and seeking shelter in a life of isolation. You have to face life squarely with determined zeal and vigour, and develop strength from every experience, pleasant and unpleasant.

The important thing, therefore, is not to negate life, but to accept it, flow with it, learn from it and to develop your self-awareness through life's experiences, thereby reinforcing your ability to emerge as the master. That is what a karma sannyasin is trying to achieve. You fully accept your duties,

obligations and vocation and strive to fulfil them to the best of your ability. You do not try to escape from your station in life, but utilize it to develop your inner strength and purpose, in order that one day you will arrive at your final destination.

So, in essence, you enjoy life, but with higher awareness. You suffer life, but with higher awareness. You do not allow situations and events to exploit you. Rather, you utilize everything in life to the maximum possible advantage for your own growth, as an individual who is in quest of the final destination.

All the World's a Stage

As a karma sannyasin, you are not required to eliminate anything from your life, rather you have to incorporate or add something into it. There are two paths designed whereby one can attain spiritual enlightenment or higher awareness: i) the path of *nivritti*, non-involvement or renunciation, which is only for a chosen few, and ii) the path of *pravritti* or total involvement, which is the path of karma sannyasa.

Due to the influence of strong inherent karma, you are motivated to act in life. It is your karma which takes the shape of desires, ambitions and passions. These karmas have to be worked out before you can proceed on life's journey. There is no sense in denying yourself the expression of your karma. It would be wrong to enforce a way of life which would suppress your karma and therefore bring you many problems later on.

If it is your karma to be rich, then by all means accumulate wealth, or if it is your karma to be famous, then there is no harm or danger in it. But, at the same time, you have to realize that your status in life is only an expression of your karma and once that particular karma is worked out, the situation will cease spontaneously. Therefore, you should be able to accept both positive and negative karmas and, at the same time, strive to replace the negative karmas with the more positive.

The karma sannyasin does not negate or renounce anything in life, which is due to the deep understanding he develops of the expression and direction of his life, on account of his karma. He earns money and lives well, wears good clothes, enjoys life like everyone else, and has a family which he loves. In fact, there is nothing that he does not experience as a karma sannyasin. But, at the same time, he is always aware of the purpose behind the life he leads. He does not lose himself in the joys and sorrows that accompany life. If it is kind to him, he accepts it. If it is unkind, he is unperturbed because he realizes that there is a lesson to be learned from every situation that he faces.

Renunciation is only possible for those who have eliminated most of their karmas, at least the stronger and more deep rooted ones, or for those who have the willpower and strength of mind to face renunciation in spite of desires and ambitions. What is the use of renouncing everything and then being ridden with desires and guilt for having abandoned life? No, life has to be lived in harmony, not in tension and distress.

Perhaps, at times, the idea of retiring to a solitary cave does seem appealing, like a balm you apply to your tired eyes, but there is no escape from the thoughts and worries which assail you day and night. They will follow you even to the cave that you seek for shelter. They will haunt you in your more reflective moments, and instead of achieving peace and tranquillity in solitude, you will develop more restlessness and frustration. It is better to remain in the sphere of activity and involvement, expressing and eliminating your desires, rather than seeking refuge in solitude and renunciation, and finding that your mind is always hovering over the things you have left behind.

No, renunciation is not the answer for those who are still ruled by their karma. The answer is active involvement in life, but with a difference. First of all you develop an awareness of yourself, and your life, so that you are able to discern what life is trying to teach you. You come to know your strengths

and weaknesses, how to react in both negative and positive situations. You assess your attachments, your neuroses, your emotions, such as love, hatred, anger, jealousy, and what brings them to the surface. You become a witness to your life. You are totally involved with life, but at the same time, you are also witnessing all of its events. This is the best way to learn about yourself and to develop higher awareness.

Secondly, you have to find a way to express your karma without building up more karma to influence your future. This is a great problem. On the one hand, karma is being expressed and thereby released but, on the other hand, you are building up more karma. It seems inexhaustible, like an endless chain. So how are you going to get out of it? The only answer is to work out your karma, so that old karma is exhausted and new karma is not generated.

In order to achieve this, you must regard yourself as an actor in a mammoth production. You are playing many parts – husband or wife, father or mother, son or daughter, boss or employee, businessman or politician. Oh, so many parts! You do not miss any cues; you remember all your lines, and you even enjoy your roles. But, at the same time, there is a part of you that is not involved in what you are doing. That part of you remains detached. It does not care for the outcome of the performance, but simply enjoys the act of performing.

Just as the actor is not affected by the joys and sorrows of the character he portrays, in the same way, you should remain unaffected by the ups and downs of life. So you regard your role in life as a duty which you enjoy immensely, and which you perform efficiently and accurately but, at the same time, you do not spend your energies worrying over the results and rewards which you receive as an outcome of your efforts. Nor do you become unbalanced by each and every joy or sorrow that you confront.

If you speak to anyone who is totally involved in his profession, who loves his work and regards it as an expression of his life, he will tell you that he enjoys his work so

much that he loses total awareness of the rewards accruing from his personal efforts. To such a person, his work is the highest form of love, devotion and sacrifice, and the noblest manifestation of life. The fact that he enjoys his work enormously generates a detachment towards the fruits of hard work, such as name, fame and wealth, which are only the by-products of hard work; they are not the motivating factors for his actions.

The performance of your duties should be carried out, regardless of the rewards which you are going to receive from them. Of course, the benefits will be yours to enjoy, but they should not determine and influence your actions. Your actions are guided only by pure and selfless motives at all times, in every area of life. You do not work hard because you will make more money, neither do you do so for name and fame. You do not love your husband, wife or children on account of expectations of love in return. You do not do acts of charity so that people honour and respect your goodness. You perform them out of a sense of duty and responsibility.

The rewards you receive are incidental. You do not have to refuse or deny yourself the enjoyment of the benefits. You avail yourself of them to the maximum, just as you would enjoy them if you had worked with expectation. But on account of your detachment, you are not dominated by the rewards and they do not become the centre of your life. The important thing is not the pleasures derived, but the sense of duty and awareness you feel towards your responsibilities. Therefore, you work selflessly, detaching your thoughts from the outcome of your actions and concentrating totally on the act itself. Then you will find that the rewards are sweeter and more pleasant, and that you enjoy them without becoming a victim of them.

The point is that all the suffering and unhappiness we face in life is on account of our personal attachment to and dependence on pleasure. Our energies and thoughts are dissipated by our anxieties about the rewards we expect from our efforts. With attachment comes suffering because we are

afraid of losing what we have become attached to. Moreover, even if you do attain the object of your attachment, you are forever scared of losing it. Besides, very often you do not derive as much pleasure or reciprocation from the object of your attachment as you expected.

This causes untold suffering and you are compelled to express your unhappiness towards others around you, thus negatively affecting them, as well as yourself. All these actions build up more and more karma and are retained in your mind as *samskaras*. The more you expose yourself to the endless cycle, the stronger they become, and then you find that you can no longer cope. But if you express your karma with an attitude of inner selflessness and detachment, then you are exhausting your karma without creating new karma.

This is a very intricate philosophy, but as it plays a vital role in your life it has to be understood properly. Everything you do forms karma and in trying to express that karma, you are continually building up more and more karma. This karma affects your life, personality and emotions. Therefore, you have to choose your actions well. Then again, it is not the actions alone which are important, it is the attitude you have while performing them. If they are motivated not by any expectations, but by a sense of duty and responsibility, then you do not build up more karma, in spite of being involved in life and enjoying its benefits.

One important factor which needs to be mentioned is that this whole process of detachment, selflessness and higher understanding should take place internally. Nobody need know what you are thinking or doing in regard to your life; it is your personal affair. Externally, you are the same person. You enjoy everything. You do not deny yourself or your family anything. You are not a renunciate or an ascetic. You are a part of society, like anybody else.

Internally, however, you are doing a lot of cutting and pruning. You are striving to discard all the emotions which are anti-life, through a higher understanding and awareness. You regard your whole life as a duty or an obligation

that you are pleased to participate in, but you do not have any dependence on the rewards attained through the fulfilment of that duty. Of course, this attitude cannot be achieved overnight. It is an ongoing process which you begin with initiation into karma sannyasa and it could take a lifetime. Nevertheless, it all depends on your sincerity and perspective of life's values.

Karma

The laws of karma determine your birth, status and circumstances in life. The word *karma* is derived from the root *kri*, which means 'action'. In this case, karma is defined as the action which is preceded by a definite cause. Every cause results in an action. This simple fact is evident all around us. You sow a seed; it sprouts and blossoms into a tree, which bears fruit. The fruit is eaten; the seed falls down, and thus this act causes another tree to be born. It is an endless chain of cause and effect. In every case, it is seen that the effect justifies the cause.

In much the same way, every individual has potential and dormant seeds of karma which are related to many actions done in past lives, and which must be expressed during the course of one's present life. If you sow the seed of an apple, it will only produce an apple tree and no other kind of tree. Just as the seed of an apple will only produce an apple, in the same way, it is your karma which decides if you are to be rich or poor, beautiful or ugly, sick or healthy, famous or obscure, a sannyasin or a householder. It is your own actions which determine your future; therefore, the doctrine of karma advises us to choose our actions well.

However, as the karma of your present life is predetermined, you are compelled to undergo it. Therefore, you have to fulfil the obligations and duties required of you in order to express that karma. Each one of us is born with a specific

purpose, a specific duty, a specific goal, and it is for the fulfilment of that goal that we consciously or unconsciously strive. This aim or goal is the outcome of the *samskaras*, or experiences, which we have accumulated, either in past lives, from birth, or even inherited from our parents.

A *samskara* is defined in modern scientific terms as an archetype. Just as a seed contains the archetype of the fruit it will bear, in the same way, you have archetypes which are impressed and stored in your psyche. Every simple experience, no matter how trivial and unimportant it may be, creates an archetype or *samskara*. These *samskaras* influence your character, personality and life. The food you prefer, the clothes you wear, the people you are attracted to, your talents, hobbies, emotions, strengths and weaknesses are all a result of these *samskaras*.

The brain is continually receiving, decoding and storing information. This process is taking place all the time, even when you are not consciously aware of it. For example, a baby lying in a cot is an indirect or unconscious witness to the murder of his mother. He does not comprehend what is happening because he is only nine months old, but there is an area of his brain which has recorded that experience and in time it forms a *samskara*. Later in life, perhaps when he is much older, this *samskara* explodes and expresses itself as a part of his personality. He may not relate it to that event, for he may have no conscious recollection of it, but nevertheless it made an impression on him.

Another important point is that these *samskaras* are not stored in the form of the experience that you underwent. If that were the case, it would be easy to understand the mystery of *samskaras*. If you dissect the seed of an apple, will you find the big tree? No, but the tree is contained in the seed. Similarly, *samskaras* are stored in the form of symbols and patterns, and sometimes they reveal themselves in a manner totally disconnected from the event that gave birth to them.

Dreams, visions, experiences in meditation are all a result of the *samskaras* you have collected in life. There are some

samskaras which are more deeply embedded, and in order to bring them out you have to go very deep into yourself. Others are more easily expressed. Some samskaras are very potent and explosive and they remain with you for a long time. Others are more feeble and do not necessarily compel you to act in a certain manner.

If you are a terribly violent person, it is on account of a strong samskara in you. If you are kind and charitable, then it is also due to your samskaras. If you are popular and loved by everyone, it is due to your samskaras, and if you are despised and shunned, it is also because of your samskaras. You are the architect of your samskaras and therefore of your own life. Although you have the option to influence your future by developing the right samskaras, in the present circumstances you have to undergo the outcome of all that is already accumulated within you.

The doctrine of karma states that there are three kinds of karma: *sanchit karma*, *kriyaman karma* and *prarabdha karma*. To illustrate this, let me give you an example. A bowman pulls an arrow out of his sheath and aims it at the target. After steadying his aim, he releases the arrow which goes directly to the target and strikes it.

The arrow in the sheath is *sanchit karma*, karma that is stored and has not yet begun to fructify. The arrow in his hand, aiming at the target is *kriyaman karma*: it is still within his control and has not yet been released. It is his decision whether to allow the arrow to hit the target, or to return it to the sheath. Once the arrow is released, however, it goes straight to the target and then no one can stop its course. It will express itself. This is *prarabdha karma*.

So, we are an outcome of our karma and we have to abide by it. However, the wise, even while working through their karma, are aware of its purpose. If you go against your karma, you will cause conflict, tension and strife, and if you are not strong, you can easily fall. Therefore, it is said that if it is your karma to be a householder and to lead a worldly life, do so. There is no need to renounce, as long as your

karmas are strong. But, at the same time, you should realize that your life as a householder is an opportunity for your karma to work itself out. The moment that karma is exhausted, you will be free; you will be released from that duty or obligation.

A karma sannyasin has to regard his involvement in life as an expression of his karma. Therefore, it forms a part of his dharma or duty. He must not overlook or negate it. Every experience can be utilized as a stepping stone to higher evolution. So, he lives as an ordinary householder, experiencing everything, but at the same time, using all his experiences to raise his awareness, thereby arriving at a state where he does not create any more karma.

He is expressing his karma like anybody else, but because of his higher awareness, goal, dedication and proper understanding of life, he is able to free himself of karma, of the laws of cause and effect. At this point, he may renounce or do whatever he wishes, but until then he has to live his life and experience it fully as a karma sannyasin.

Life Has to be Lived

From the moment you are born into this world, you are compelled to act. If you had no desire to act, you would not take birth, but as the architect of your own life, you have to make a firm decision regarding the kind of life you are going to create for yourself. Remember that you are the sole creator of the heaven or hell in which you live.

The life you have been born into is the medium for you to express your higher faculties and dormant potential. Life is a treasure trove full of opportunities, but by the time you realize its importance, most of your life has been spent. The secrets, the mysteries, the bliss, the heaven, are all within your grasp in this very life, but you miss out on them due to your lack of discrimination.

I will tell you a story which illustrates this. One morning before sunrise a fisherman went to the river. Near the bank he felt something hard under his feet. He picked it up and, fumbling in the darkness, concluded that it must be a bag of stones. He was waiting for daylight to break in order to start the day's work. Immersed in thoughts and anxieties, he absentmindedly picked up a stone from the bag and threw it into the water. Plop! came the sound. He mused over it and threw in another stone. In this way, to amuse himself he started to toss away all the stones, one by one.

Slowly the sun rose and by the time it was light, the fisherman had flung away all of the stones. Only one was

remaining in his hand. His heart almost failed him when he looked down and saw there, shining in all its lustre, was a beautiful diamond. He cursed himself many times over when he realized that in the darkness, lost in his sorrows, he had thrown away many rare gems. Full of remorse, he sobbed, cried and went almost out of his mind with grief. Accidentally he had encountered a mass of wealth which could have enriched his life many times over, but in the darkness, unknowingly, he had flung it all away.

For most of us, too, there is darkness all around. Time ebbs away, and the sun never rises. So we throw away the gems of life without ever realizing their value. Life is a bag of precious gems, but in ignorance and darkness we take it for granted that life is nothing but a collection of worthless stones. If you have a mind to see, you will find there is a lot of good in life. In every situation, there is a mine of riches and wealth, but you regard it as worthless stones simply to be thrown away.

Throughout life you are moulded by the way you think. Ultimately it is your attitude towards each event and situation in life which makes or mars you. It changes and shapes your life and helps you to awaken your soul. Your attitude towards life influences the path of your further evolution. When you realize that your attitude towards life will mould you for the future, you may immediately try to change your way of thinking. You may begin to view life from a completely different standpoint.

The problem does not lie in your husband or wife, your child, your parents, your home, your wealth, your happy or unhappy circumstances; it lies within yourself. Change yourself and automatically your whole life changes. Just as the whole world is bathed in light when the sun rises, in the same way, you can brighten your life with the intense flames of discrimination and proper understanding.

Ordinarily, we believe that whatever is opposed to life is religious. In the name of religion we are taught the negation of life. Time and time again we are chastised for

our involvement with life and reminded of the consequences we may have to face after death. But, if you are unable to justify your life, how will you cope with what you will face after death? The preparation for death is also to be done in and through life. If there is another life after death, there too you will be confronted by that which you have experienced in this life. There is no escape from this, even if you negate or renounce life.

To adore life is the greatest sadhana. To avail yourself of life is the highest tribute you can pay to yourself. The one who misses life is sure to miss everything else. But the tendency has been exactly the opposite. You regard life as a trial. In childhood and youth you are not given the proper education and foundation for the future. You are sent to school to learn the ABC but, in fact, you learn nothing. For when you are faced with a crisis, you crack up. Then you begin to moan and groan; you become disillusioned and think that life is unjust.

If life makes you despondent, it is because of your impure perception. Life can shower happiness upon you if the proper way of living is known. But in order to learn that way of life and thereby derive joy from it, you will have to alter your way of thinking. That is what the path of karma sannyasa teaches you. Karma sannyasa does not mean the disbanding of life. It does not ask you to turn your back on life, but rather to face it squarely. Karma sannyasa is not escapism; it is the way to fully embrace life. It is a thorough realization of life. Thereby karma sannyasins give their lives a spiritual goal, aim and direction. For they begin to understand that in order to evolve spiritually, they have first to understand the events and circumstances of their life. They become active participants in life by transforming and elevating their own goals, ideals and purpose.

It is our purpose that ultimately defines our character and sets us apart as an individual. In the final analysis, it is not what you are doing that is of consequence, but the purpose for which you are doing it. For your self-evolution it

is necessary to live life thoroughly, but at the same time your purpose should be constantly clear to you. When you create a family, what is your purpose? There can be many purposes. The purpose of an ordinary person would be for procreation and enjoyment, but for a person of higher awareness, a karma sannyasin, it would be entirely different.

A prostitute may thrive on her profession and still have a noble purpose. On the other hand, a priest may worship daily in the temple, but his purpose may not be pure and sublime. A thief may rob thousands of people every day, but his purpose may be to feed the poor and sick. A wealthy person may support many charitable organizations, but his purpose may be most uncharitable.

Therefore, karma sannyasa begins with the redefining of the aim and destination of life. This new aim is related to the understanding that all events in life, whether ordinary, extraordinary or sublime, are only stepping stones or transit halts and have to be regarded in that light.

What is Detachment?

It is a common belief that in order to be detached one has to renounce everything. But this is far from the truth. Detachment does not mean renunciation, and one can attain a detached state of mind even while possessing and enjoying all the luxuries of the world. Detachment is a state of mind which is far deeper than mere renunciation or negation of life. In fact, there is no guarantee that one who has renounced the world is truly detached from it. You may be carrying your attachments around in your subconscious mind.

Detachment does not mean indifference or dislike. We often imagine that a person who is detached will be indifferent to those around him and dislike everything that reminds him of what he has renounced. But this is not the case at all. Detachment is only possible for those who remain unaffected or undisturbed by every situation in life. Only the person who is able to maintain equipoise and balance in the face of success and failure, love and hatred, pain and pleasure, is truly detached.

It is attachment that leads to your experiences of happiness and unhappiness. With attachment arises dependence on the object of your attachment and with dependence comes slavery – you are then controlled by your attachments. If the object of your attachment is out of your reach, you become miserable and hanker after it. Then again, if you manage to own it, you are in constant fear of losing it. Thereby your

freedom of expression, behavioural patterns and outlook on life become limited and tainted.

With attachment arises the idea of possession, the sense of ownership – my house, my car, my family, my wealth. This sense of ownership is an outcome of the lower ego. With each new possession your ego is reinforced, until finally your possessions begin to dominate and control your life. Your action, thoughts, likes and dislikes, emotions and desires, are all guided by the dominating influence of the ego. And if by the cruel hand of fate your possessions or attachments are in jeopardy, you lose control; you go insane. Instead of being the master of your possessions, you become a slave due to the strength of your attachment.

If you can conjure up a picture of an enormous man, who is chained to the ground in such a way that there is absolutely no means of escape (perhaps Gulliver tied to the ground would be the perfect example), it would give you an idea of how we are bound and limited by the chains of attachment. We simply cannot escape the torments of victory and defeat. We are victims of every circumstance and event. Like a pendulum, we swing from elation to sorrow, but we do not have the strength or ability to control the repercussions of these influxes on our personality. So, in the course of time we feel shattered and destroyed.

Detachment, on the other hand, develops freedom of thought, word and deed. It frees you from the fetters which bind you to the ordinary plane of awareness. One who is detached may enjoy every pleasure of life, acquire wealth and status, raise a family that he loves, control a vast business, or even an empire. On account of his detachment, however, he is never dependent on them. He enjoys everything, but as the master and not the slave. On account of his detachment, he develops an inner freedom or independence which nothing can conquer. No adversity can shatter him, because he remains unaffected, and no amount of success can affect him, for he is established in equanimity. Thereby he becomes the master of himself in every situation.

Detachment, therefore, should be understood as the ability to remain unaffected in the face of the trials and tribulations of life. With detachment comes a greater feeling of love and unity with those around you. Earlier you had loved only because you were attached to or dependent on the objects of your love for your happiness. So, in fact you had ceased to love. Of course, on the surface it appeared as though you loved, but in truth you were only loving for your own benefit. It was your need, your dependence, your attachment, your craving, which created love.

However, with detachment you experience love which is not bound or restricted by personal likes and dislikes, greed or ambition. The love is devoid of personal motives, as you are not dependent on the object of your love. You simply love because of the unity you feel with those around you. It is only with the development of detachment that you can manifest the universality of your personality and express the higher qualities which are inherent in you. As long as you are attached, you remain restricted to the realm of your baser emotions.

This is precisely why the guru is an expression of the universal spirit. Although he loves each and every one of us alike, he is truly detached or independent of the external or internal factors which dominate human beings. To the guru, saint or sinner, rich or poor, learned or stupid, beautiful or ugly, are all alike.

Although this state of detachment is no mean achievement, it should not deter us from trying to cultivate it in daily life. A karma sannyasin has to discover the negative influences generated by personal attachments which affect the emotions and personality adversely. Gradually an inner detachment should be developed, in order to allow the experience of real happiness, love and satisfaction to arise.

Although detachment is a spontaneous inner development, karma sannyasins can implement it in their lives by first developing attachment, not only to their own possessions, but to each event or object in life. If you love your own child,

you should also learn to love the child who does not belong to you. If you are careful and attentive towards your own personal possessions, you should learn to pay heed to others' possessions as well. It is only after you have developed a universal attachment to everything around you that you will begin to experience inner detachment.

When you visit the ashram, you should consider it to be your home for the few days that you spend there. An ashram belongs to nobody in particular, but to everybody in general. An ashram is the outcome of the work and contribution of many residents and visitors. Each person cares for the ashram without any sense of ownership. In the same way, you should learn to care, even if you do not own a particular object. In the course of time, this attitude will lead to a greater understanding and inner experience of detachment.

Qualifications

It is said that the day you feel dispassion for the mundane pleasures of life and a yearning for spiritual life, you should take sannyasa, and that the day you awaken to a higher sense of discrimination, you should become a karma sannyasin. Discrimination and dispassion are the two jewels which every spiritual aspirant should try to cultivate.

Just as there is higher and lower discrimination, there is higher and lower dispassion. Lower dispassion results in detachment towards external life, external pleasures. Out of that arises a higher dispassion, which is detachment towards the inner emotions such as like and dislike, joy and sorrow, and all the dualities of life.

Lower discrimination is that faculty which determines our sense of taste, touch, smell, sound and sight. For instance, we discriminate between certain foods, music or films. We prefer certain people, situations, events and circumstances, according to our level of discrimination. One person may spend most of his spare time listening to satsang or reading books on yoga and higher philosophy, while another may prefer to watch television or go to a party.

Some may discriminate between the foods they eat and only take those which are conducive to their health, while others will just eat anything. This is lower discrimination for, after all, even an animal has discrimination concerning food. If you give it food which is alien to its nature, it will simply sniff

at it and turn its head away. Each person chooses according to their level of discrimination. This lower discrimination, if experienced in daily life, ultimately gives rise to higher discrimination. Human beings have the inherent power to reason. It is this faculty which distinguishes them from animals, plants and other living creatures, and it is this which leads to higher discrimination.

Higher discrimination arises out of self-study and self-analysis. At times, you try to assess your values, principles and motivation in life. It is when you begin to realize that the purpose of life is far deeper and nobler than just eating, sleeping and procreating that you are ready for karma sannyasa. Then you begin to reassess and re-evaluate your contribution to life and to your own growth, and find that it is severely lacking. You find that your extrovert nature has inhibited the infinite potential of your inner being.

Ordinarily you act on the basis of the senses which feed you information, and respond according to your likes and dislikes. But there is another faculty within you, which is the source of indirect knowledge or intuition. This is the basis of higher discrimination or *viveka*. If you are able to tap this source, you will have unearthed an extremely valuable asset. Then, no matter who or what you are, you will shine in your particular area of life.

All the great men and women in history who have been outstanding in their respective fields, achieved success on account of this higher faculty which lies dormant in most people today. When you begin to realize and understand this important factor, then you are ready to take up the life of karma sannyasa. When you realize that you yourself can make a better world, that it is you who creates your own heaven or hell through the use or misuse of your own faculties, you also begin to accept that all the problems, difficulties and unhappiness which you have encountered so far are not due to any external circumstances but to your own limited nature. When you desire to free yourself from these limitations, you are ready for the path of karma sannyasa.

Therefore, discrimination or right understanding is the basis for your acceptance of this path. If you have begun to develop this higher faculty, you will definitely be open to karma sannyasa as a way of life. It does not matter what work you do, what food you eat, whether or not you are married, whether you are old or young, male or female, Hindu, Muslim or Christian. It does not matter what nationality you belong to or which language you speak. The only important factor is that you have begun to discriminate and opt for a better quality of existence, in which you are able to stand out amongst the multitudes rather than being just one amongst the millions who are swept along by the current of life.

Is Religion a Barrier?

The ideals and philosophy of karma sannyasa do not conflict with the basic tenets of any religion. Although karma sannyasa is not a religious doctrine, it upholds the values and principles of a spiritual goal. Karma sannyasa does not impose moral or ethical principles on the individual, but gives a practical and sound guideline for living life, keeping in mind an integral growth in all spheres of being.

Karma sannyasa is a philosophy which can be imbibed by any individual regardless of caste, creed, colour, sex, age or religion. It does not ask you to follow any particular religion, nor does it compel you to give up your own religion. Nor is there any institution or religious head to whom you have to pay obeisance. The guru stands as a guide from whom to draw inspiration and direction, but he does not impose any religious or moral beliefs on you. You are free to follow any religion you wish and still be a karma sannyasin.

The essence of all religions is to unite and create an atmosphere of love and harmony amongst people. But over the centuries, conflicting ideals have generated enmity and animosity between the followers of different religions. This has led to wars and crusades, plunder and rape, all in the name of religion, so the purpose has been defeated.

Karma sannyasa gives you the opportunity to share a common philosophy with your fellows, regardless of religious beliefs. It does not matter if you are a Muslim, Christian,

Hindu, Jew or even an atheist. You can maintain your religion, your moral and ethical values and still adopt the philosophy of karma sannyasa. It does not stand in conflict with your religion. In fact, it strengthens and reinforces your beliefs. Through initiation into karma sannyasa, people all over the world have come together in the spirit of unity and dedicated themselves to the higher evolution of all mankind.

Relevance of Ashram Life

Although the ashram tradition is rooted in antiquity, it epitomizes the need of the modern individual. Today, in many parts of the world, many people are opting to spend their holidays in an ashram, as it gives them an opportunity to rejuvenate themselves physically, emotionally and spiritually. Expensive holidays usually turn out to be a mad scramble and are not so relaxing and rewarding as the simplicity and tranquillity of ashram life.

Let us try to understand the reason for this revival of ashram life all over the world. Firstly, most ashrams are situated in quiet, secluded places amidst the glories of nature, the chirping of birds, and quiet swaying of trees. Far away from the din and bustle of cars and aeroplanes, one automatically feels relaxed and more in tune with oneself. Although this is an obvious factor, it does not in any way constitute the primary reason for the serenity you feel in an ashram.

It is something far deeper than the external surroundings. It is the spirit of the place. Every place has an air or feeling about it, which pervades the atmosphere. You can sense it the moment you arrive there. There are some places which you spontaneously react negatively to, no matter how beautiful or lavish they may be. This is on account of the subtle forces permeating the atmosphere. These forces are built up over an extended period of time by the persons who have occupied the place.

An ashram is a storehouse and generator of spiritual energy. The ashramites build up such an atmosphere of positive vibrations that even a casual visitor is bound to be influenced by the surroundings. Just as the vibration of a tuned violin can bring all the other violins into attunement, so the sattwic nature and spiritual emanations of the inhabitants of an ashram draw out the innate purity and dynamic, spiritual energy of all those who come there.

Visitors are amazed to find that they begin to feel differently the moment they arrive in the ashram. Negativity turns into positivity; despair and frustration are replaced by a keenness and eagerness to face life squarely. Illnesses cease to torment the body and mind as before. Of course, for the hard core negative individuals the positive influence may not be felt instantly, but nevertheless even such persons cannot resist and are finally drawn out of their shells to look at their problems differently.

This is the essential element which draws people to ashram life. The atmosphere, lifestyle and spiritual vibrations of the ashram restructure the emotional, psychological, psychic and spiritual makeup of the individual until he is able to tune into the higher frequencies reverberating in himself. Naturally he is bound to feel better.

We may not be aware or conscious of the fact that many times our thought patterns, habits and neuroses influence our surroundings negatively. This causes a field of negativity to grow around us, and although we may think of it as an abstract phenomenon it can be perceived consciously or subconsciously by most people. In time, this rebounds and deepens the negativity in us. What we had projected as a mere thought force boomerangs back onto us with greater momentum. Many of us have encountered such experiences.

When describing or depicting a particular setting or home, we often say that it was warm and inviting, or cold and repelling. It is the people living in a place who make it so. The objects, colour scheme, buildings, trees and setting merely reflect the personalities, thoughts and vibrations of

the people who inhabit the place, and in time they acquire the same traits.

In an ashram the positive influence is infinitely greater and far more potent than any negativity that may enter the environment. This is due to the spiritual dedication and simple nature of the people who live there. Anyone who visits the ashram is bound to imbibe that positivity, whether consciously or subconsciously. Moreover, this spiritual and dynamic energy is maintained at a very high level that is constant and consistent.

It is for this reason that every karma sannyasin should try to spend some time each year living in the ashram and, through this experience, eventually create an ashram in his or her own home. The house itself should become a mini ashram, where not only the family derive benefits, but anyone else who visits from outside feels a sense of warmth, peace and unity.

Each family member should try to live harmoniously with themselves and their surroundings. Of course, troubles and difficulties do arise sometimes. Life can never be smooth sailing all the time, but you should learn to face these disturbances without disrupting the smooth flow of the overall family structure. At times there may be fights, conflicts and tensions, but the pervading atmosphere should be harmonious and peaceful.

Harmony and unity can only be achieved within the home if the family members have truly imbibed the spirit of the ashram, which lies in karma yoga or selfless service, work done without any personal motive. The spirit of karma yoga should ultimately become a part of the personality, so that it can be practised spontaneously at all times. But initially it is necessary to expose oneself to ashram life in order to imbibe and understand the true concept of karma yoga.

In an ashram all the members perform their duties without expecting any personal reward. They do not look for personal gains from the work that they do. Instead they divert all their energies to the fulfilment of the task, without

any expectation or attachment to the result. This induces a high level of awareness and therefore greater perfection can be achieved. In time, no matter what work is assigned, the individual becomes capable of doing it perfectly. Moreover, one develops an ability to overcome the conflicts and tensions which one faces through one's interactions with life.

Karma yoga is not just selfless service or detachment from the rewards accruing from work, but work done with a higher level of concentration and awareness. The importance of the work does not lie in what you are doing, but in how you do it, how aware you are and how concentrated your efforts are. Is your mind distracted by desires and ambitions, or is it one-pointed on the task you have been given?

The primary sadhana of a sannyasin is karma yoga. Other sadhanas, such as hatha yoga, raja yoga or kriya yoga, are only secondary. It is through the dedicated practice of karma yoga that karma sannyasins cleanse and purge themselves of karmas and samskaras, without creating any new karma. As the mind becomes more refined, the awareness is heightened, concentration is achieved and the consciousness evolves to a higher dimension.

Karma yoga practised in the ashram environment is important for the growth of higher awareness. In your family environment you may often face the difficulty of being unable to divert your energies from negative expression. With the people who are known to you intimately, you are seldom able to rise above the baser emotions. You tend to take them for granted. But in the ashram, working and living amongst many other people who are complete strangers, your ego does not play tricks with you. Moreover, the positive vibrations of so many spiritual sadhakas and karma yogis also help to inspire you.

Therefore, the karma sannyasin should try to visit an ashram as often as possible. It is in the ashram that you will discover the method to stabilize your energies into spiritual awareness. It is here that you will find the higher meaning to each and every act that you perform. In the ashram you will

derive inspiration and sustenance from the spiritual forces that have awakened in you. Your contact with the ashram will increase and accelerate the pace of your evolution. Through ashram life you can develop the spirit of karma yoga as a part of your personality, and then when you return home to your family, you will be able to recreate the same beauty and harmony in your home environment.

The Guru Factor

We have not yet been able to fully comprehend the need for a guru in our lives. There are so many terms and definitions for guru, but each one gives us only an intellectual understanding. In practical terms we always fall short in relating to the guru. As he or she manifests themselves in the physical body, we are often deluded into relating to them as ordinary men and women. We think that because they sleep, eat, read, laugh and speak like us, they must be limited like ourselves. Therefore, we tend to regard them as teachers or masters who have spiritual knowledge, but who are still one of us.

This, however, is not the case. No doubt the guru exists in the physical body, but he operates on a much higher plane. The guru is God himself manifesting in a physical form to guide the disciple. It is your finite mind that requires the physical embodiment of God and, therefore, he manifests as the guru. With the finite mind you can never comprehend the infinite nature of the ultimate reality. So, the guru guides you to that realization through interaction with you. He is truly the link between the individual and the divine.

The divine force is seldom perceived directly, for the individual does not have the awareness to comprehend it. Therefore, the guru acts as a medium for this divine force, and it is through him that the disciple first receives the grace. Until the disciple is able to become a direct medium for

divine grace, it is only through the guru that he can receive it. So always try to see the divinity in your guru. Remember that whatever you regard the guru to be, that is what you will become. If you regard the guru as just an ordinary person, then your relationship is sure to remain in that realm, whereas if you truly regard the guru as a manifestation of the divine, then you are preparing yourself to meet the divine face to face.

The karma sannyasin, like any other sadhaka, requires a guru. Without the guru, it is nearly impossible to maintain balance and harmony in life. The guru's guidance enables you to uphold your spiritual values in the face of difficulties and, at the same time, to understand the purpose of your life. With the guru, you do not require verbal instruction or long discourses; his mere presence is enough to purify and inspire you.

You may learn yoga from a teacher; you may listen to the wisdom of many spiritual masters, but ultimately, you have to find a guru who is more than a teacher and master. Such a guru is rare, and in order to find one you will have to develop into a sincere and superior seeker, because only then will you be able to recognize the guru's divine qualities. Your judgements are based on your level of perception. A blind man can never know the light of the sun unless his eyesight is restored. In the same way, in order to see the divinity of the guru, you will have to develop a higher quality of perception.

Once you have found a guru and been initiated, you should try to develop a deeper and more abiding link with him on all levels. Only then can he aid you in spiritual life. Remember that guru is not an ordinary teacher; his methods of teaching are not limited to the areas with which you are familiar. His aim is to induce self-knowledge and self-awareness in the disciple. He may use any method to do so, and you should not mind. Do not try to judge the guru once you have surrendered yourself to him; the guru is not to be judged by the finite and limited mind of the disciple.

Doubt is the great destroyer in the life of a disciple. You should question the guru and then reflect over what he tells you, but with faith, not a doubting intellect. Questioning and doubting are two very different attitudes. Questioning is a necessary step to the acquisition of knowledge. Doubting is refusal to accept, to think, to look within and understand. Under the cover of doubt, the ego thrives and continues to assert itself.

Once the karma sannyasin has surrendered to the guru, he should try to become receptive to the guru's transmission. This can only happen if one is aware of the guru at all times on the conscious and subconscious planes. The karma sannyasin should not think that, since he has not renounced everything, he cannot be an effective medium for the guru's mission. To be an effective medium it does not matter what you have renounced, or how close you live to the guru. You may live thousands of miles away and see him only once in ten years. You may be an active participant in worldly life, still you can be his medium if you remain aware of his presence in everything you do.

You should regard the guru as your closest friend and counterpart, who accompanies you at all times. When you eat, he is eating with you; when you watch movies, he is there watching over your shoulder; when you sleep, he is beside you. In fact, he is your constant companion. Do not intellectualize about his presence. Do not try to think that you should be good because he is with you at all times. Just be natural; allow the free expression of your personality but keep him with you. He is your most intimate friend from whom you have no secrets. Gradually you will be able to tune into his frequencies and energy field. You will be able to perceive and understand his guidance. That is how you come closer to your guru.

As a karma sannyasin you have a definite role to play in the guru's mission. Being a householder does not limit your capacity to serve the guru. If you are receptive, you can become a very vital transmission pole for the guru's energy.

As a member of society, you come into direct contact with many people and you can convey the guru's teachings and wisdom far and wide.

However, you should not try to discipline others. You should teach by setting an example, not by preaching and giving long sermons. You should shine amongst the multitudes and act as a lighthouse, drawing distressed people to you. Your warmth, radiance, equipoise and correct judgement should serve as an example for those who seek spiritual guidance, and gradually you should lead them to the higher path of life.

As a karma sannyasin you can also serve the guru through the tradition of *dakshina*, which literally means, 'sacred offering'. Dakshina symbolizes surrender of the ego to the guru. Attachment of wealth, property and riches is a clear indication of the strength of your ego. In offering a portion of your material assets to the guru, you begin to sever the strong and obstinate roots of the ego which are implanted in you. Remember, the guru does not require material gain. His only concern is with your spiritual gain, and for that you need his riches more than he needs yours.

In truth, it is your own need which is being fulfilled every time you offer dakshina to the guru. In giving a portion of your wealth to the guru you are surrendering your ego and eliminating your karma, thereby accelerating your spiritual evolution. So, in giving you are actually receiving, in sharing, you are in fact replenishing yourself, and in surrendering your ego, you are elevating yourself spiritually.

As a disciple you should feel that there is nothing in the world which you would hesitate to offer to your guru. The guru deserves the best of everything because he has pledged himself to serve the spiritual upliftment of others, rich or poor, happy or unhappy, weak or strong, expecting nothing in return. You should never hesitate to serve and support such a soul.

So, as a karma sannyasin you have to keep in mind the following points regarding the guru. Firstly, you must find a

guru who is more than just a teacher. Secondly, you should develop a strong and abiding link with the guru, leaving no room for personal doubt, hesitation or judgement. Thirdly, you should consider yourself as a medium for the guru's grace and strive to receive his transmissions or instructions by developing a greater awareness of him. Last but not least, you should not hesitate to serve the guru whenever the opportunity arises.

Initiation

Many people are of the opinion that initiation is not a vital factor in karma sannyasa. They feel that they can maintain the philosophy and ideals of karma sannyasa without initiation. However, this is far from the truth. Just as there are formal ritual ceremonies at every stage of life, such as christening, engagement and marriage, in the same way, there is an initiation ceremony which marks the beginning of your life as a karma sannyasin.

The purpose of this initiation is to emphasize the sacredness of the act and to formally commit yourself to a particular goal. It is a celebration of the new life you are about to begin, and an acknowledgement of certain values and principles that you hold.

Although rites and rituals appear to be external, a subtle metamorphosis takes place on an internal level. The external act is symbolic of a whole new approach to life. The process of initiation is not restricted to the laws of time and space, but is an ongoing process that pervades your whole existence. It awakens your willpower or ability to manifest the dormant potential within you. It acts as a symbol of your dedication to the path you have chosen, and in times of difficulties serves as a reminder of the noble decision you have made.

Most people are afraid to commit themselves to one guide, one path and one way of life. Therefore, they are overwhelmed by the idea of initiation. You think that after

initiation you are branded forever and will thus miss out on many of life's opportunities. You will, however, derive far greater benefits from initiation than you can imagine.

Initiation gives you a definite goal and purpose to incorporate into your life. Most people spend their whole lives searching for this goal, and when they find it, they are afraid to commit themselves. You have to take the plunge sometime, after all, initiation into karma sannyasa does not require any external change in your lifestyle. The dedication is internal, the values upheld are internal and the reorientation which takes place is internal.

As a member of society, you are also afraid of what people will think if you are initiated into karma sannyasa. You are worried about their ridicule and scorn. But how long are you going to lead your life governed by the views and ideas of others? People come and go in your life, but in the final analysis you have to learn to live with yourself alone. Nobody follows you life after life. You have to journey alone and you must learn to stand up for your own ideals and principles, even in the face of insult and injury.

Sometimes you feel apprehensive about the demands initiation into karma sannyasa will make upon you. This is an unnecessary worry. You will be amazed at your inherent potential which you have previously failed to draw out, but which manifests in your life as a karma sannyasin. You will feel the benefits in your mind, body and environment. Your present attitude towards life is tainted by wrong beliefs and philosophy. Karma sannyasa gives you a positive philosophy and way of life by which you can become more dynamic and aware of yourself and the world in which you live. It gives you a sound approach to life which abides by you in all circumstances. It teaches you the transcendence of pleasure and pain, sickness and health, wealth and poverty, so that you begin to realize the overall scheme of life. Then you begin to flow with the current and not against it. You harmonize yourself in all situations, instead of antagonizing and being antagonized by them.

Moreover, initiation develops a link between you and your guru. During the ceremony, the guru transfers his spiritual energy to the disciple, thus inspiring him to aspire to greater heights in his spiritual life. Initiation is a spiritually charged communication between the guru and the disciple. If the disciple dedicates his life to the guru, the guru in turn assumes the responsibility of being his spiritual guide. This is a bond which is established during initiation.

At the time of initiation, the guru also gives a spiritual name, a mala and a geru dhoti, to mark the disciple's entrance into karma sannyasa. The spiritual name is an indication of your inherent potential and what you should aspire to become. Each of you has an internal or subtle personality hidden behind the external form. The spiritual name relates to your psychic and spiritual personality, and that is what you have to strive to perfect. The guru, with his psychic vision, is able to recognize your inner potential and to bestow a name on that basis. It has a very special meaning in your spiritual life, as it is completely personal.

The geru *dhoti* or unstitched cloth stands as a sacred symbol of spiritual strength, awareness and dynamism. *Geru* is a colour that symbolizes peace and tranquillity within and without, and therefore draws others to you. They are spontaneously attracted by the geru colour and unconsciously develop trust and confidence in your spiritual strength. The karma sannyasin should wear geru cloth at the time of sadhana as it induces a soothing effect on the personality. In your home, or during your spare time, you may also wear clothes dyed in that colour. It all depends on the environment in which you live and what you find most suitable.

The *mala* should only be worn during sadhana as it is a sacred gift from the guru to the disciple. The guru has the ability to charge the objects given to you at the time of initiation and, therefore, they should not be taken at face value. Even if you do not use them frequently, you should keep them carefully and privately, and try to draw inspiration from them.

Initiation opens up a whole new world of experience which you had earlier been unable to comprehend. It starts an unending process of inner development and outer harmony. It is through initiation that you begin your climb up the ladder of spiritual life. Without initiation into karma sannyasa, the householder disciple's life is incomplete.

In order to receive results, you need dedication. This holds true in any sphere of life. If you do not dedicate yourself to what you wish to achieve, your results will be unrewarding. It is through dedication that you gain fulfilment and progress. Initiation unfolds that dedication which will help you through the difficulties and joys of life as a karma sannyasin.

Sadhana

Sadhana is the way to transcend the barriers of the mind. Ordinarily you are required to utilize your mind and intellect to battle through the circumstances and events of life. It is a natural process; the mind and intellect rush to your rescue when you are faced with any situation. Although this mind serves its purpose in daily life, as far as spiritual life is concerned, you have to aim for the higher experiences.

Only when you transcend the mind and the intellect will you perceive the intuitive faculty which is very powerful and a source of the most accurate knowledge. This is a pure experience which can be termed as 'mindlessness', where the thought and the thinker merge into one another. No thoughts assail you at that point. That is the experience of the divine.

But how can you achieve this state? The sages have declared that it is primarily through your own personal effort and endeavour that you achieve anything in spiritual life. In the final analysis, it is only your determined zeal and ceaseless efforts that take you to the point of fulfilment.

The guru, of course, is indispensable as the medium. It is through him that the divine energy is passed on to the disciple. He is the guide, the inspirer and the generator of spiritual experience within you. In some cases he is even known to absorb the karmas of the disciple, thereby hastening the disciple's spiritual experience. But the guru

acts only on the basis of your sincerity and dedication to sadhana and spiritual life.

It is only during the period of sadhana that you are wholly immersed in the process of delving deep within yourself. At other times your awareness is externalized, but during sadhana you momentarily transcend the passage of time and cross the infinite borders of space. You exist unseen, unknown, yet your existence is a total reality. At that moment, you are able to experience an abstract facet of yourself, which in ordinary life is regarded as a myth.

You expend your thoughts, passions, desires and other karma at the subtle and causal level during the period of sadhana and emerge cleansed of many impurities and obstructions. That is precisely why you feel refreshed and light after an hour of spiritual practice, because you have decreased part of the burden which you have been carrying for many decades in the different realms of your consciousness. It is like shedding a heavy weight and releasing the tension.

Karmas are quick to accumulate. In fact, you are continually building up samskaras which determine your future karma. Therefore, in order to counteract this constant inflow of impressions, you have to consistently follow some spiritual practice so that you do not become overburdened and bend with the weight.

It is not just a question of finding a suitable sadhana. The regularity you maintain in its performance is the important thing. As long as you are regular in your yoga practices, even if you can only devote a minimum period of time, you will definitely travel very far into your inner self. Irregularity in sadhana is the first obstacle you have to cross, otherwise you will not get anywhere.

In the spiritual quest, it is not the accumulation of knowledge which you are trying to achieve, but a personal experience of that knowledge, and this experience can only be obtained by constant and consistent effort in your practices. If you practise sadhana for a year and then leave it for six months, you can no longer say that you have practised for

a year. That period of sadhana is lost as far as experience is concerned. But regarding intellectual knowledge, you have not lost anything.

This is the basic difference between knowledge and experience. The path of knowledge can be resumed from the point where you left off, but experience must be started again from the beginning. Therefore, because the ultimate aim of your spiritual quest is not just knowledge but personal experience, you must be regular.

Patanjali, in his *Yoga Sutras*, has termed this regular and continuous repetition of practice as *abhyasa* and he says that it is one of the only ways to control the fluctuations of the mind. Daily repetition of the practices given to you by your guru is termed *abhyasa*, and it is an invaluable help towards enlightenment.

Satsang and swadhyaya, or scriptural and self-study, are useful aids in spiritual life, but ultimately you will have to convert all that knowledge into personal experience. You will have to put it into practice. Without that, you can never aim at transforming yourself. You may listen to long discourses on meditation every day for many years, but that will not give you personal experience of meditation. In order to have that experience, you will have to develop the practices yourself and do them consistently each day without fail. Only then will you be able to witness any results.

Of course, as a karma sannyasin you have certain duties and obligations. You have a job and your family to take care of. Your time is not your own. You may have to travel miles for work, returning home late and tired. Then there is the food to cook, the dishes to wash and the children to feed. Your energies are dissipated and all you really want to do is to go to sleep.

In spite of this, you should try to be regular in your sadhana. This is a minor discipline, but it is infinitely rewarding and you will undoubtedly feel the benefit very soon. Your days will be less tiring; you will feel more energetic and in harmony with yourself and your surroundings for, by

practising sadhana, you are revitalizing your energies and giving yourself renewed momentum and direction. And along with that, you are discarding the impurities and dross which have accumulated through your experiences day after day.

Therefore, a karma sannyasin has to find time for personal sadhana. If you are very busy, then fix a bare minimum period of fifteen to twenty minutes, but maintain regularity. Your practice does not have to extend for hours, but it does have to be consistent and constant.

Set a fixed time and place for your practice and strive to maintain it. Sadhana practised at the same time every day and at the same appointed place is infinitely more fruitful than doing your practices at varying hours and in different places. When you practise sadhana in a particular place over an extended period, that place absorbs the positive vibrations emanating from within you and the atmosphere becomes charged. Then later, when you sit down in that place, you will spontaneously drift into a state of tranquillity and oneness with yourself. In this way, the whole process becomes much easier. Not only you, but anyone else who enters your place of practice will feel the effect of the positive vibrations you have created.

You need the right atmosphere for your spiritual practices. It is best to find some corner or spot in your home which is relatively or completely isolated. Keep a mat or cushion for your use during the period of sadhana and maintain it only for that purpose. Then, at the appointed time, wash your hands and face and, if it is feasible, light some incense or an oil lamp. Sit down in an asana or steady cross-legged posture for your meditation or whatever it is that you have been given to practise.

As a karma sannyasin, you are still actively engaged in worldly affairs and you have to guard against becoming too introvert. If you practise your sadhana too intensely, you will find it difficult to relate to your duties in the external world. In sadhana, a different state of mind develops and some people find it hard to balance both states of mind. So, when

it is time for you to settle down to work, you may wish to be alone and immersed in contemplation.

This is not the way for a karma sannyasin. You have to maintain a balance at all costs. Your spiritual life should not encroach on your worldly life in a manner which is detrimental. Rather, it should enhance your interactions with the world. It is therefore advisable that you lay greater stress on regularity, rather than intensity of practice. Then, when you have some free time which can be devoted solely to sadhana, you can utilize it for intense practices.

It is best to set a few days aside every year or every six months for intense practices, and during the rest of the time practise the normal routine sadhana. During those days of intense sadhana, you should enforce a stronger discipline on yourself, setting strict guidelines regarding diet, sleep, practices and isolation.

During the retreat, sadhana should be the focal point for the day's activities. All distracting influences, such as newspapers, magazines, novels, telephone, television, friends and relatives, should be removed at that time. You should try to remain completely in tune with yourself. If this is not possible in your home, you should arrange to stay in an ashram or in an isolated, natural place like the mountains, forest or near the sea.

When the period of retreat is over, you should return to your normal daily routine and resume your life as before. This is a very effective way to develop your spiritual potential and yet remain actively involved in daily life. Fasting and silence (*mouna*) should also be practised occasionally as they are great purifiers. Just as we are often assailed with physical diarrhoea, mental diarrhoea is also a common ailment which results from mental overloading and nervous tension.

Therefore, it is a good idea to set aside one day in the week for fasting. On that particular day, you should eat only one vegetarian meal after sunset. During the day, however, you can drink fresh fruit juice or water to cleanse the system. This practice energizes the whole body.

Silence, or mouna, is also a powerful practice to energize the system and develop inner sensitivity. However, this practice should be restricted, it should not be done as frequently as fasting. When you observe silence, you should try to fill your day with yoga practices, meditation, japa and swadhyaya. During that day try to raise your awareness and tune into your guru's frequencies. Be more aware of him and try to discover the world within, rather than without. As in all practices, each individual should practise only as much as he or she is capable of and after consultation with the guru.

Swadhyaya

There are times in spiritual life when you may face disillusionment and waver in your convictions. This is especially true for those who, in spite of long and arduous practice, fail to have any sustaining inner experience. You may then begin to regard the ultimate experience as a myth. After all, it remains an abstract phenomenon until it becomes a living reality. If you are unsuccessful in attaining any substantial experience, you may curtail your practices due to misgivings and lack of inspiration.

At such times, if there is no one at hand to inspire and reaffirm your convictions, you may feel dejected and full of despair. This can happen to any aspirant at any time. It is a natural outcome of your spiritual journey. Do not expect to be bright, cheerful, optimistic and full of faith and devotion at all times. It is impractical and incorrect to think along these lines.

Indecision, disbelief and lack of inspiration are an integral part of your existence and you have to learn to deal with them. You should learn to cope with all these conditions without letting them affect you adversely. After all, even the sun is often covered by clouds, but once the clouds are rent asunder, the sun shines with even greater brightness. Therefore, there is no cause for alarm. If you feel that your convictions and beliefs are facing severe trial, try to learn from that situation too. When the clouds of doubt are washed

away, then you will find a greater fulfilment in the life you have chosen.

You have to find the ways and means to revive your inspiration. One of the most useful and constructive methods is that of *swadhyaya*, self-study or self-analysis through the scriptures. Swadhyaya is a practice which should be followed by the aspirant throughout life. It may not always be possible to avail oneself of the discourses of wise men and women, but spiritual texts can be studied at all times and in all places. When your spiritual convictions and inspiration are in jeopardy, you should use swadhyaya as a means to revive your faith and re-establish equanimity. When you read about the lives of great men and women who have suffered life's trials and tribulations as we do and who have attained self-realization, then your faith is reaffirmed.

One such text which deserves special mention and which should become the guide for karma sannyasins is the *Bhagavad Gita*. The uniqueness of this text lies in the fact that it does not propagate the beliefs of any particular religion or sect. It has something to teach all of us, for it is a practical philosophy applicable to our daily lives. The *Bhagavad Gita* does not interfere with your station or duties in life; it does not disturb your faith or lure you away from the path you have chosen. Rather, it illumines that path and strengthens your faith. Its aim is to free you from the effects of unruly desires, unjustified prejudices and imaginary fears and thereby raise your awareness to a higher level.

It is possible to live in the world and still be full of peace and tranquillity. The *Bhagavad Gita* throws light on this ideal. The scene is set on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. The battle refers not only to the great war which took place there, but also to the constant struggle which each individual faces in the battle of life. Arjuna, seeing all his relations lined up on either side waiting for the slaughter to begin, is overwhelmed by a sense of futility and despair and does not want to fight. To take him out of his indecision, Krishna defines the correct attitude and direction that should accompany one

throughout life. He tells Arjuna that inaction goes against the laws of karma. A man, he explains, has to develop his higher awareness, not by abandoning his duty, but through its enactment. Each and every action is related to the development of man's consciousness.

Arjuna desires freedom from action, but Krishna says that this is impossible for action is carried out not only by the body but also by the mind. Action is an integral function of the conscious and subconscious mind. Action cannot be eliminated as long as the impulses of nature are still functioning. However, action is only binding when your likes and dislikes, pain and pleasure, attachment and detachment are involved. It is the desire for the fruits of the action that has the power to enslave us, and not the action itself. As long as you are living in the body action is necessary, but if the spirit of sacrifice and detachment is predominant, then action becomes a source of illumination and liberation.

There are three basic types of action – right action, wrong action and inaction. Inaction is inertia, procrastination and laziness; wrong action is based on desire, ignorance and the inability to follow the guidance of one's inner being. But right action is that which brings control and harmony within our nature. If properly expressed, right action transforms itself into the highest realization. Action becomes realization when you renounce the expectation of rewards. Then action ceases to be bondage. The *Gita* speaks about freedom from the bondage of action, not from action itself.

This is the spirit of karma yoga, and that is what the *Gita* teaches. You should work with concentration and higher awareness. In such one-pointed action there is no trace of the lower ego. When you work with concentration, losing all awareness of yourself, the work is infinitely superior. You may have already discovered this for yourself.

Krishna himself was a householder and therefore a karma sannyasin of the highest order. Although he is regarded as an *avatar* or incarnation of God, let us consider him to be a man, albeit a perfect one. In Krishna, non-attachment is the

predominant ideal; work for work's sake, do not ask for more! Pleasure accrued from work will come to you, but do not hanker after it or be enslaved by it. In the midst of the battlefield, Krishna inspires Arjuna with the following words: "He who, in the midst of intense activity, finds himself in calmness and peace is the greatest yogi and wisest man."

While standing in a busy marketplace, at an airport, or amidst the terrible calamities of life, you can still retain the same tranquillity and equanimity as you do in meditation. That is what the *Gita* teaches you. If you can do this, you have understood life and can become its master, says Krishna, otherwise not.

The *Gita* is the greatest book which combines practical and spiritual life for the upliftment of mankind. In it lies vast potential and knowledge to guide every person along the spiritual path, no matter what their station in life. Perhaps the *Gita* is the only book in which there is no conflict between the different paths leading to higher awareness. It shows you the way by clearly defining your goal, and says no more.

The Great Sage King Janaka

One day, Sukadeva, an accomplished yogi with the highest dispassion, was troubled by a portion of the scriptures which dealt with the life of householders. His father, Vyasadeva, tried to explain to him that the path of a householder was also a way to enlightenment. Sukadeva could not understand it and asked his father, “How can a householder be liberated when he is still immersed in maya or worldly life? Is it possible for him to enjoy pleasure and yet remain unattached? How can his actions be termed as inactions? Can he remain unaffected like a lotus leaf which emerges out of water and mud and still remains unsoiled? How can the duality of enemy and friend, like and dislike, good and bad, be absent from his mind? Is it possible for him to view all alike, even though he has to deal with the practicalities of the world?”

Sukadeva was still greatly perplexed, so Vyasadeva told him a story about King Janaka, one of the greatest sages in India, who was an exemplary householder. He ruled over the ancient kingdom of Mithila (now a part of Bihar) and attained liberation, even while he was immersed in governing a large kingdom. Janaka was the greatest ruler of his time. Externally he lived like a king but internally his mind, emotions and spirit were like those of an enlightened sage. He was always true to himself and this was evident in his every thought, word and action. Whosoever visited his

kingdom was taken aback by the extraordinary wisdom of this great ruler.

In those days, it was the custom for everyone, rich or poor, to have a guru. Even the kings and royal families patronized a guru of their choice. They often visited his ashram and lived with him like anybody else, for in an ashram there is no distinction between rich and poor. King Janaka's guru was Yajnavalkya, and he was dearly loved by him, not because he was the king, but because he had developed an intense unity of spirit.

The other disciples of Yajnavalkya, however, became jealous and criticized him for favouring Janaka because he was the king. So Yajnavalkya decided to show them the superior qualities of a disciple like Janaka. Through the power of his mind, he created a fire in the capital of Mithila. The whole city was enveloped in flames. The disciples were alarmed and ran to their respective cottages to save their belongings. All fled except Janaka. He ignored his riches and treasures burning in the city and turned his attention to the safety of his subjects. He instructed his ministers to regard the lives of his people first and foremost.

During the crisis, Janaka remained unperturbed by his own losses, thinking, "Nothing do I lose, even though Mithila may be burnt to ashes, but it is my duty to look after my people." Then the disciples realized why Yajnavalkya favoured Janaka. An ignorant man is only aware of the needs of his own body, whereas a wise man knows the needs of others and serves all men the same as himself.

Sukadeva listened intently to the story and when it was finished, he rose and said, "I will go to Mithila to meet this man called Janaka. I believe it is next to impossible for a man entangled in the maya of life to have attained such wisdom. Let me see for myself if this is true." So he journeyed to Mithila. On reaching there, he went straight to the court of the king. But Janaka, who already knew of his arrival, detained him for three days before he consented to meet him. During this period, he presented Sukadeva with all

the pleasures a young man could yearn for, but Sukadeva remained unaffected by them. After testing the sincerity of the young seeker, Janaka brought him to his court.

Sukadeva bowed to King Janaka and said, “Oh, great king, my father has ordered me to marry and raise a family. I do not desire marriage for I consider it a bondage, but he firmly believes that married life, if undertaken with the correct attitude, is also a path to enlightenment. I do not understand this and therefore he has sent me to you, who are enlightened, even though you live as a householder with wife, children and a kingdom to rule.”

Janaka beckoned the young boy to his side and said, “The net of desire is very difficult for man to overcome. Desires never die. In order to put an end to them, it is advisable to cut them gradually at the root. Just as an ant eats away the root of a tree, ultimately causing the whole tree to die, in the same way, a man or woman should go about removing their desires by degrees from one stage of life to another. Desires are very difficult to control. Weak and undeveloped minds cannot conquer them all at once. Desires can influence anyone at any time, even the person who considers himself to be a perfect renunciate. Therefore, it is important that you first try to control your mind, body and emotions while interacting with life, so that you become aware of your strengths and limitations. Only then will you be ready to reach for the highest goal.

“Householder life is regarded as an important stepping stone in the evolution of body, mind and spirit. If a householder is able to develop higher awareness through his involvement with life and is able to accept success and failure, pain and pleasure with equanimity, then he acquires the experience of everlasting happiness, without negating the pleasures of living. Though I am engaged in ruling my kingdom, if any kind of pain or pleasure arises, I am not affected by it.

“This is due to the fact that I fulfil my duties without any personal motive of attachment, greed or desire. I carry

out my responsibilities as a duty I must fulfil. Anyone who approaches life in this manner will find fulfilment, regardless of whether he is a householder or an ascetic. It is the mind which is the source of pleasure and pain, bondage and freedom. Freedom does not lie in abandoning your situation in life, but in accepting your duties and undergoing them without being adversely affected by them.”

Sukadeva interrupted Janaka saying, “O king, how is it possible for a man to be free from desire for the fruits of his actions, while still immersed in the activities of life? You too, as a king, are ruled by taste, touch, sight, sound and smell. You consider a thief to be a thief, a saint to be a saint, and your loved ones are still dear to you. You feel glad when success comes and sad when you happen to fail. You become anxious when you think of your enemies, the loss of your wealth, or the weakness of your army. How then can a man of your status and position hope to eliminate these influences from his personality?”

To this question King Janaka replied, “What you have said is true. I do concern myself with matters of wealth, property and assets. I look after my family and love and care for them as much as anyone else would. I do regard a thief as a thief and a saint as a saint, and I give them the necessary punishment or respect. But, at the same time, I do not allow any of this to affect me internally, as I am not attached to the outcome of my actions, be they pleasant or unpleasant. As a king, it is my duty to rule my country efficiently, to increase the wealth and assets of my kingdom, to punish and reward the people in order to maintain justice and law, to employ certain strategies to guard the interests of my people and kingdom. As a father and husband, I am required to love and care for my family, to provide them with all they need.

“I am truly involved in doing all that is necessary for the happiness of my family and people. Thereby I derive happiness and contentment. But there is a subtle difference; I am not attached. In the face of losing everything, I remain unaffected. My satisfaction is derived from doing my duty

and not from the consequences of my actions. I have found true happiness in concentrating my energy and skills and performing all my duties perfectly. Even if you renounce everything, but fail to develop this attitude, you will be unable to overcome your misery. It will follow you up to the last days of your life, whether you live in solitude or amidst the hustle and bustle of life.”

Hearing these words of King Janaka, Sukadeva prostrated before him and after receiving the royal sage’s blessings, he returned to his father. Though Sukadeva adhered to the path of yoga, he married a beautiful young lady named Pivari. Together they raised a family and attained the highest state through yoga.

The Primal Instinct

What is the predominant instinct that governs the life of an average person? What is the source of his motivation? What is the strongest urge in the depths of his mind? Is it the desire for liberation? No! If you search for that central drive in the deeper layers of the mind, you are sure to find something quite different there; something which is being pushed into oblivion, crushed or ignored; something which is rarely faced consciously. However, this constant denial of the primal instinct causes a greater momentum of that force which ultimately devours him.

What is this power, this enormous force which causes so much dissatisfaction and distress in the face of unfulfilment? Leaving aside human beings, let us consider the animal or vegetable kingdom. What is the main motivating factor behind all of their activities? The whole energy of a plant or animal is directed towards procreation. If you observe the way of nature, you will find that the one function which governs all others is this process.

The same is true for man, but he has created unending confusion and conflict within himself by constantly denying and disparaging this primal urge. The sexual urge has been deliberately condemned for thousands of years. Instead of recognizing its vast potential, man has abused it, concealed it or pretended that it does not exist. However, the truth of the matter is that there is nothing more vital in man's life,

and it is imperative that you understand this in relation to your own self.

Today we are afraid to discuss matters pertaining to sex. We are too shy and inhibited to bring this topic up. For some, discussing sex is like bringing the skeleton out of the cupboard. We think sexuality pertains to a part of our personality which is dirty and despicable, and that it is best to suppress or ignore it, and thereby it will disappear. But this is not the answer.

Have you ever noticed that your mind is most drawn to the thing which you are trying your best to avoid? The more you ignore or suppress the sexual urge, the more potent it becomes. You do not free yourself of this powerful drive simply by crushing and trampling it, rather it roots itself deeper and deeper in your consciousness.

This attitude towards sex is responsible for innumerable inner conflicts. The pleasure of passion and lust, which man is unable to control, comprehend or express, has led to countless, severe cases of neuroses, mental instability, fear, anxiety, stress, psychoses, sexual disorders, lack of confidence and insecurity. The fault lies not in the individual, but in religious and moral beliefs which have been preached regarding the infamy of sex. Man has been brainwashed for hundreds of years into believing that sex is sinful, evil and anti-spiritual.

In answer to this view, it can only be said that, if sex is sinful, the same God who created it is the biggest sinner. However, it is not God who has sinned but we ourselves. Due to our perverted and distorted minds, we have regarded the primal force, which is the source of life itself, as the source of evil. To denigrate the sexual act into an act of perversion is to create a split between yourself and your basic nature, thereby developing complexes in your personality. The sexual urge is a product of nature. No matter how much you battle with it and try to suppress it, you will find yourself unable to do so because to begin with, you are approaching this facet of your life with a wrong understanding.

No matter who has said this in the past, who is repeating it now, or who will proclaim it in the future, the sexual act is not detrimental to spiritual life, regardless of who or what you are. If you close your mind to this truth, then you are severely impeding your growth as an individual. You are pointlessly subjecting yourself to a restraint which you are unable to bear or cope with, and the results of this can be disastrous and devastating.

Ancient tribes and cultures did not have these conflicting and false views about sex. To them, it was a natural urge to be expressed, as and when the need arose. They did not, become obsessed with the idea of sex, simply because they did not consider it as a diabolic act. So there were very few records of sexual perversion, rape and child prostitution in those days. If these evils exist in our society today, it is due to our distorted views about the natural act. Parents are brain-washed by religion and society on the so-called evils of sex, and they in turn drill that fear into their children from a very early age.

The funniest and most absurd thing is that, in spite of all this hullabaloo, everyone continues to have sex. It is not that you put an end to your sexual needs by trampling on the very idea of sex. You continue to have sexual interaction, but on account of your negative conditioning it creates guilt and fear in you. Therefore, you develop phobias and neuroses due to your unruly passions. You feel that you are the victim of a sinful act, when that is absolutely untrue.

Moreover, when children are taught about the evils of passion and sex and then see their own parents indulging in that very act which they have condemned, it causes a severe shock and abrasion in their minds. They begin to see the hypocrisy and sham behind these proclamations and ideas, and it creates confusion and conflict in their approach to life and relationships with the opposite sex. This often leads to sexual problems and perversion.

We have to accept that the sexual urge is not only natural, but one of the most powerful facets of our personality and

mind. We must handle it as carefully as an undetonated bomb. It has to be delicately manoeuvred until it can be defused, otherwise the outcome may be disaster.

So, right from the outset it is necessary to establish that the sexual urge or the sexual act is not anti-spiritual. It will not send you to hell as you have been led to believe. Secondly, you have to eliminate the suppressions, guilt, complexes and taboos that you have imposed on your mind due to the influence of social, moral and ethical beliefs. Sexual suppression is far more harmful than the expression of that urge. Through suppression and fear of the primal instinct, you can conspire to make the whole world a lunatic asylum.

The idea is not to suppress sex, but to transform and sublimate it. Just as a lump of black coal is transformed into a brilliant diamond, in the same way, you transmute the primal instinct into a highly illuminating experience. The primal energy is so powerful that you should never underestimate its significance. It is perhaps more explosive than an atom bomb. Just a mere fraction of that energy can create a Buddha, a Mahatma Gandhi or an Einstein. Imagine that! In that seed of sexual energy resides the dormant potential to create a Buddha, and still we are ranting and raving about its influence on us.

If you could transform this potential force into a higher energy, imagine what you would be able to create. Have you ever thought about it? Have you ever considered the outcome of transforming that very energy which you are denying? But in order to transform that force, you have first to begin to understand it. Throw away all your guilts and complexes about an act which is as sacred as life itself. You have to understand the purpose of this urge, the way in which it works and its final culmination.

The transformation or sublimation of the sexual force cannot be brought about by abstention, neither can it happen through indulgence. In order to transform this energy, you will have to introduce a third factor into your daily life and that is the science of yoga and tantra. Tantra has clearly

stated that man can raise his consciousness by utilizing the same force which keeps him chained to the lower, gross awareness. According to this ancient science, man should unleash his primal energy and raise it to the higher centres of the brain through the practice of yoga.

In this philosophy, suppression has no place. Suppression will boomerang to overindulgence and result in perverted sexual activities. Overindulgence also has no place here because it leads to dissipation and exhaustion of the vital energy. It is best not to go to extremes. Take the middle path, the path of yoga and tantra and transform the primal energy into a higher and more explosive experience – meditation!

The experience you derive from the sexual act is a mere titillation of the nervous system compared to the experience you can gain if you sublimate that sexual energy to the higher centres. Ordinarily, during sexual interaction the passion is aroused, your nerves are activated and when you reach the final culmination of the act, you feel a release of nervous energy and tension. But if you are able to direct that same energy to the higher centres instead of releasing it, that same bliss is experienced in ajna chakra and is extended over a greater period of time. Your pleasure is therefore greatly intensified and heightened so that when the experience culminates, you feel recharged and revitalized instead of drained and washed out.

In the tantric practice, the experience of energy explosion at the sexual peak is controlled. As long as the experience continues, you can direct the energy to the higher centres. Certain yogic practices enable the practitioner to control the release of energy from the body and channel it to the higher centres. In this way, a more powerful experience is created whereby the kundalini or spiritual force is awakened.

There are three purposes for sexual life. The first is pleasure, the second is progeny and the third is samadhi or higher experience. In tantra, sexual life is practised for no other purpose than samadhi. If you can develop this

experience, then most of your sexual problems will gradually disappear. You will not have to look for sexual affairs outside your marriage for you will find the fulfilment that you seek. Neither will you grow obsessive or neurotic about sexual life. You and your partner will develop mutual respect and a bond with each other on account of your rewarding experience. You will not even feel the necessity to consult the religious scriptures or preachers on matters pertaining to your sexual life. You will be able to determine for yourself whether the sexual act is healthy or unhealthy, evil or sacred.

A karma sannyasin has to understand this matter perfectly. If you are married or have a partner, you should not try to deny your partner or yourself an act which is part of your dharma or duty. Under the guidance of the guru, sexual life can lead to a point of total fulfilment, culminating in spiritual awakening or higher experience. Thus the sex act becomes a sacred or divine union between two people, and the bliss and harmony they create in their lives is reflected in their personalities and in the children that are born through this union. The same energy which was responsible for the lower passions is transformed into a source of spiritual experience.

Is Celibacy Necessary?

The question of celibacy often arises when you are thinking about changing your lifestyle and becoming a karma sannyasin. In India, the word for celibacy is *brahmacharya*, which literally means, ‘one who abides in Brahman’. It is to be noted that there is actually no reference to the matter of sexual interaction. In the Vedas, it is proclaimed that one who is eternally united with Brahman is a brahmachari. The stress, therefore, is on the resolute determination to abide in the spirit of Brahman and not on the actual sex act.

In your opinion, who is greater – one who loudly denounces sex, but secretly craves and hankers after it, or one who participates in sexual life, but keeps their heart truly immersed in God? What is the point of hypocrisy in this matter? After all, the only person you are deluding is yourself. The following story illustrates this point.

A pious priest lived in a temple. It so happened that in front of the temple was a prostitute’s house. Seeing the constant stream of men who visited the prostitute, one day the priest called her and said, “You are a miserable wretch, sinning day and night; your lust and passion are never satiated. God will never forgive you. You should try to be like me; I don’t indulge in the evil act of sex.”

The poor prostitute was repentant of her misdeeds and with genuine love for God, she prayed to him to forgive her. But as prostitution was her profession, she could not easily

adopt other means of earning her livelihood. So, whenever she 'sinned', she kept her mind and awareness on God. She listened to the prayers and chanting in the temple and in spite of her profession, she yearned for the day when she would be pure enough to visit the house of God. The priest, on the other hand, was very disturbed by the proximity of the prostitute. At all times, day and night, even when he was praying and meditating, he could not stop his thoughts from wandering to the happenings at the prostitute's house, and in his mind he fantasized about it.

Many years rolled by, and one day the prostitute died. By a strange coincidence, the priest also died on the same day. The messengers of God carried the spirit of the prostitute to the heavenly regions, whereas the messengers of the Lord of Death carried the priest to the netherworld. The priest called out to God, "Is this justice? I passed all my life in abstinence and prayer and I am carried to hell, while this prostitute who lived in sin is going to heaven." Then he heard the voice of God, loud and clear, "You foolish man, even though you spent your days in abstinence and prayer, your mind was wandering elsewhere in the prostitute's den, whereas she, although her body was engaged in carnal activities, kept her mind wholly on me."

From this story we clearly see that the evil lies, not in the body which is merely expressing a physiological urge, but in the mind. The danger lies, not in the act itself, but in the mind which becomes obsessed with and hankers after the act. If the mind is pure, then you have won half the battle. What is the point of suppressing the body and allowing the mind to run riot? A thought is also a potent force. Thought is the beginning of action. It exists in a subtle form within the mind and is as much a reality on the mental level as an action is on the physical level. Therefore, never underestimate the power of thought. In the final analysis, it is your thoughts which make or break you. As you think, so you become.

Therefore, celibacy must be understood in this light. It is not just abstention from sex at the physical level, but purity

of thought, word and deed. It is not just an expression of religious and moral beliefs that are imposed upon you from outside, but the spontaneous expression arising out of the effulgence of your spirit. If abstention is applied only at the physical level, and the mental level remains infected with desire and lust, then the very idea of celibacy is denigrated.

The practice of celibacy should not be underrated. It has powerful effects on your whole being and will help you in your spiritual life, but it has to arise as a natural outcome of your life, not as an act of suppression, guilt and brainwashing. If celibacy is an act of suppression, the outcome can be disastrous. The mind becomes rigid and closed in its outlook. You regard the members of the opposite sex as demonic and evil, and your ability to love humankind is seriously impaired. Under these circumstances, it is impossible for you to learn to love God. If you cannot love God's creation, then how can you say that you love God? This is the paradox.

Mahatma Gandhi, the great saint and leader of India, practised celibacy for many years. He often wrote about his personal experiences. His beliefs about celibacy arose from an understanding of himself and his relation to life, not out of hatred for members of the opposite sex. In fact, Gandhi's wife grew to be his closest friend and he always respected her for the part she played in aiding him towards becoming a perfect celibate.

Celibacy cannot be a discipline; it has to be a consequence of the energy transformation which is going on within. You put your whole energy into spiritual practices so you do not have any energy left for sex. This happens in ordinary life too. Look at great painters, poets, singers dancers. When they perform or express their art, there is no thought of sex in their minds because their entire energy is expended on their creative expression. Sex is a superfluous energy release. When you have too much nervous energy, you use sex as a safety valve, otherwise you will burst or explode. Suppression of this energy will not help either. You have to use it through sex or learn to transform it into a higher form of energy.

You cannot impose celibacy on yourself. It has to occur spontaneously as a result of an inner experience from this life or a past life. If a person imagines that he can become a celibate without having a profound experience, then he is mistaken. A person who has had an absolute revelation, even once, is released from sexual craving. It will not exist, even in his wildest imagination or dreams. After all, a lower passion can only be transcended by transforming or replacing it with a higher passion, not otherwise. In this case, the lower passion is for the nervous titillation you derive from the sexual act, and the higher passion is for the intoxication of bliss or *anandam*, experienced during higher stages of *dhyana* or meditation.

To be a celibate in the true sense of the word, you have to become a master of the processes in the body. You must be able to control the various influxes that are created by this primal energy which is present in you and in every living being. Because, if you are not going to expend this energy in the sexual act itself, then you will have to learn the art of harnessing and reconverting it into higher energy without doing any serious damage to your own body, mind and emotions. Of course, this whole process cannot be accomplished overnight.

To achieve it, there are physiological and psychological techniques in yoga whereby the primal energy can be controlled and transmuted. Without the aid of these practices, you cannot transcend the sexual instinct. After all, the hormones which are produced in your body are responsible for the sexual urge, and their production and circulation are not under your control. Although you may try to practise celibacy sincerely, the hormones will continue to be generated. In order to counter these effects, you will have to apply particular physiological practices whereby the hormones and energy which are normally expended through the reproductive system can be utilized for spiritual rather than sexual experience. This must be aided by a mental process whereby the energy is utilized for meditation.

Unless you go deeper into the practices of yoga, it is nearly impossible to achieve the true state of celibacy or brahmacharya. In order to control the reproductive hormones, it is necessary to be careful about what you eat, how much you sleep, what practices you do, and so on, in order to gradually and systematically rechannel the energy back to its source. I shall give you a very simple illustration to help you understand this more clearly.

Imagine a vertical tube which is open at both ends. At the top it is connected to a vast reservoir of energy and at the bottom it remains open. The flow of energy through this tube is automatic because the reservoir is pushing energy into the tube at all times. When more energy is released, the walls of the tube, which are flexible, expand. At the bottom, however, the energy is just passing out of the tube, sometimes easily and sometimes with a loud bang.

You feel that this energy should be utilized so you connect this open end to a machine, which then begins to run on the energy and, in the course of time, the energy is expended. You also have another option. You can stop the energy from leaving the tube and therefore prevent it from being lost or dissipated. Through certain methods, you can invert the flow of energy and send it back to its source, the reservoir at the top. Thereby the energy does not run out, but becomes more potent and acts as a mightier force.

The same process occurs in the human body too. Energy in the form of retas (semen) is secreted from a tiny gland in the brain and passes down to the lower part of the body. In the region of manipura chakra, or the navel centre, it is converted into prana for maintenance of the body and its activities. From there, the energy goes down further to mooladhara chakra, the root centre, where it activates the reproductive glands, producing sperm and ovum. But yoga practices enable you to send this sexual energy back up to its source in the brain, allowing it to be reconverted, thereby controlling the reproductive hormones in the body. When this energy is reconverted into spiritual energy, it becomes

the *amrit* or divine nectar, which is responsible for the elevating experience of dhyana.

Sexual energy and spiritual energy are not two different energies, rather they are two different forms of the same energy. It is the same energy which is distributed either as sexual energy or spiritual energy, but these two forms are as different as earth and sky. When the energy is experienced externally in the lower centres of the body, it is called sensual or sexual experience, but when the same energy is rechannelled back to its source and experienced internally in the higher centres, it is known as spiritual experience.

In history only a few have achieved this state of mind, They were not ordinary people, but stood out from the multitude, resplendent with spiritual power, able to influence and guide mankind spiritually. Here, however, we are dealing with the average type of person who has not learned to control the forces in the body and mind, who is totally subservient to nature and, therefore, to the lower forces. Unless they understand the process by which they can attain a higher and more elevating experience than sexual pleasure, they cannot think of transcending that basic urge.

Family Life

The family unit was created in order to stabilize and secure the position of individuals who choose to live together and help one another throughout life. The family members thus serve as a strength and security for each other. They know that in times of trouble their family will always support them. In addition to that, there is the obligation which parents feel towards their children. They try to help them monetarily when times are difficult and also provide for their future through the system of inheritance. The child inherits the wealth of the parents and this acts as a surety throughout life on which he or she can always rely.

This was the original purpose of creating the family system. After all, a woman who bears a child requires some assurance that she and her child will be provided for. Apart from the required financial support, emotional and psychological support are also important. The security of being loved, wanted and cared for is an inherent need in all of us. We require a base or foundation on which to stand throughout life, something we can take for granted. The love and warmth we received in our childhood is very influential in forming our personalities and behavioural responses to the people and events which we will face later on.

However, in spite of its importance we find that today the family unit is disintegrating. The son no longer cares for the father, the father and mother spend most of their time

in conflict, and the children are left to fend for themselves and grow up as strangers to each other. The parents do not win the respect of their children and therefore they do not share their confidence. The whole family situation is turning into a mere superficiality as people become less and less compatible with their fellows and environment. Eventually, this disintegration affects society and results in all kinds of social problems.

In order to control the baser instincts, you have to feel a certain sense of responsibility or duty towards someone or something. That obligation prevents you from going over the edge because you care for and love those whom this would undoubtedly affect. If you are very close to your family, there is less chance of your straying into situations where you will commit an act which is dangerous or harmful to yourself, your family or society. On the other hand, if you have no love for your family and feel that your actions affect no one but yourself, you are more prone to vagrancy.

As the karma sannyasin still operates from within a family situation, he or she has to be careful to understand their role in relation to the family. Firstly, it must be very clear that the family is not an obstacle to spiritual life. The wife, husband, children, parents and in-laws are all a part of the integral journey. You cannot separate yourself from them on account of a growing interest in spiritual pursuits. You have to undergo your experiences with the family, not just as disinterested onlookers, or victims of the situation, but as active participants. You have to be wholly involved in family pursuits and derive the maximum possible benefits through interacting with all the family members.

Of course, if your partner shares the same views about life as you do, and your children are cooperative and accept your role as a karma sannyasin, that is all right. But what if your family situation is not so congenial? What if your partner reproaches you constantly for your involvement with yoga? What if your children ridicule you and think you have gone crazy? What then?

It can be difficult and tiresome to confront antagonism and ridicule within the family. Very often the husband wishes to be a karma sannyasin and practise yoga regularly, but the wife does not, or vice versa. Sometimes the child yearns to become a karma sannyasin, but the parents are appalled at the idea, and this creates conflicts, tension and unhappiness in the family. If you are subjected to such a situation, you have to learn how to handle it without trying to escape from the problem. There is no point in abandoning your family.

First of all, do not impose your views on the other family members. Try not to develop a superior attitude towards them saying, "What do you know anyway?" This should not happen. Whatever the situation may be, learn to adjust. If earlier you had retorted and rebuked them for their lack of understanding, now you must learn to adapt and adjust to their views and level of thinking. If your partner wants to watch television while you would rather be meditating or reading a yogic text, cooperate with them. Do not preach about the benefits of yoga and the dangers of watching too much television. You must control your tendency to be pompous and righteous about your beliefs.

Instead, try to teach by setting an example. Let the family observe that you are becoming a better person, more congenial, compatible, calm and one-pointed. Be firm but tolerant and kind. Harshness and enforcement of your views will only cause more damage in the long run. But by silently showing how much good this way of life has done you, gradually they will be won over. Moreover, if you are living in a trying situation at home, you will have to regard it as a part of your sadhana and learn from it. If you have learned to live with happiness, you must learn to live with unhappiness also. If life were always pleasant, then you would become dull and complacent. It is the trying situations which create new strength. They enable one to develop an ability to cope with all situations in life.

Everyone wants happiness all the time. Have you ever heard anyone welcome unhappiness, misery and pain? No,

but the person who has the confidence and strength to do so is not mad, but one who knows and recognizes the value of pain. Only such a one can become a Buddha, a Christ or a Mahavir. These great souls inflicted pain on themselves in order to transmute their lower awareness into the state of supreme bliss. With pain and misery comes a higher awareness, a much greater sensitivity to yourself, to others and to life in general.

Pain and suffering make you strong and resolute, while habituation to joy and pleasantness makes you weak, dull and complacent. If you do not agree, then experiment for yourself and see how you feel in both situations. In order to grow and evolve, you require a dose of both pain and pleasure. Just as a pendulum swings first to one side and then the other, in the same way, you must learn to face both the pleasant and unpleasant.

Anyone can survive happiness, but those who can survive unhappiness have tempered themselves and learned a lesson from life. From childhood you are pampered and spoiled, brainwashed into believing that you should shun pain and unpleasantness, and if such situations arise you become insecure, nervous and frightened. You must learn that everything in life cannot, and should not, be the way you want it. You may wish to become a karma sannyasin, practise yoga and visit the ashram, but your family members may not. They may prefer to go on holiday, watch television, or attend night clubs and parties. What are you going to do then?

Are you going to rant and rave and get into fights and arguments through which nothing is resolved, or are you going to learn to adapt and adjust to their needs, giving them the assurance that you are with them and love them, no matter what they think or do? This in itself is a sadhana and if you can accomplish it, you will have increased your strength and willpower. Your family, too, will begin to respond to your needs. They are sure to realize that you are sincere and dedicated to them in spite of your difference in outlook, and they are bound to reciprocate.

Adapting and adjusting to the wants and needs of others brings out a very important facet of your personality, which is the quality of sacrifice. To sacrifice your interests for others is a sign of strength and not weakness. It will give you greater joy and create less conflict and tension in family life while helping you in your spiritual quest.

Where there is love there is sacrifice, and where there is no love there is rigidity. Learn to be flexible and open to your family's feelings and needs. It is only then that they will reciprocate and accept your beliefs, views and decisions. In order to get something, you must be prepared to give more than you hope to receive. Remember, the sadhana of a karma sannyasin begins right in his or her own home!

Children

As a karma sannyasin, your attitude towards your children is of utmost importance. Children are the joy of life. They have so much to teach us but we are deaf to their wisdom. Instead we try to impose our views on them and if they do not comply, we fret and fume. We think that our child is our possession, a toy to play with, just like the dolls and toys we played with when we were children. We had so much fun; we could do anything with them and they did not mind. Of course, when we grow up the dolls are left behind but the habits remain with us, and when we have children, the whole process starts again.

We try to express our ambitions through our children, especially the unfulfilled ones. If we aspired to be a doctor, pilot or lawyer, but could never make it, we want our child to fulfil that ambition. Or even if we did achieve what we desired, we want our children to follow in our footsteps, ‘a chip off the old block’ so to speak.

However, a child is another individual who may have desires and ambitions which are not akin to ours, yet we imagine that we have a right to enforce our views on this individual and inflict our own opinions. Then, when the child revolts and rebels, we are angry and bitter. We feel that our son or daughter has betrayed us in spite of all that we have given. We provided a home and an education and still our child does not listen to us.

As parents, we have to understand one vital factor. The child may be born of our own flesh and blood, but it has a mind and soul of its own. It has its own karma and its own destiny, and no matter what we say or do, it will act according to that. Its destiny is preplanned and we are simply the vehicle or the instrument through which it comes into the world to fulfil it. Of course, due to the intimate connection between parent and child, it does have love and attachment for us, the bonds do exist, but it still has its own destiny, and we cannot and must not inflict our impositions onto it.

Once the child is born, it is too late to think about what we want it to become. Its karmas are already defined, and its life will be an expression of these karmas which it has brought along with it. The right time to think about the quality of the child is prior to conception. It is at that time that we can endeavour to invite a noble and enlightened soul to take birth into our family.

It is only the souls with higher awareness that are free to choose the womb they will enter, and an evolved soul will only enter a womb if the atmosphere and awareness is congenial to its spiritual frame of mind. Just as a person of good taste and high standards will not visit a house which is repugnant, in the same way, a distinguished soul discriminates carefully as to the place of its new birth. Therefore, if you wish to create more evolved children, you will have to develop your inner awareness and perception to a greater degree. As responsible and more enlightened human beings, karma sannyasins should regard it as their duty and privilege to bring higher souls into the world.

Once the child is born, our duty lies not in imposing, restricting and compelling it to follow us, but in giving it the facilities, love and atmosphere to grow into an unfettered human being. Instead of clinging to our children and becoming possessive and neurotic about them, we must learn to be bystanders or witnesses, providing them with what they need. If the child requires help, then you must give it, but do not thrust it onto the child if your help is not wanted.

Remember that the child's confidence and trust in you depends largely on your attitude towards it. If you treat it as an irresponsible kid who requires guidance at every step, it will revolt and rebel. You will lose its confidence and even though it may still love you, it will separate or detach itself from you in time. After all, it is the child's life and not yours; you are simply the caretaker!

For example, if you go on a holiday and are unable to take your child with you, you may leave it with a friend. The friend loves and cares for it although she knows that it is not her own. She gives it a room to stay in, money if it requires it, food to eat, love and guidance, but she does not impose herself on the child, because the idea of ownership and possession does not arise.

The problem, in fact, is that you think the child belongs to you, and therefore you must mould its life, as a potter moulds bits of clay. But this is not how it should be. The child belongs to you only insofar as you have given birth to it, but it is a separate individual. You have to understand this point very clearly.

When the child is young it requires your help and attention, but as it grows older it becomes more independent and its needs are different. You have to adjust according to the child's needs, not vice versa. A child of four needs help to bathe, dress and eat, but a child of ten does not require it. It requires some other form of help. When it is fifteen its needs are different again. You must be able to grow with your child and interpret its needs correctly.

So, do not impose your views on the child. Let it live freely. After all, you are not the epitome of the human race. You too have imperfections and you may pass them on to the child. Each one of us has biases and prejudices and we do not hesitate to stifle the child with them.

In the ashram, children are allowed to develop freely and independently, without any interference from the adults. Of course, they are fed, clothed and taken care of, but they are considered to be individuals and not mere extensions of their

parents. It has been found that when freedom is given to the child, a sense of responsibility, confidence and respect for others arises naturally from within. Moreover, every child has inborn talents, and in order to draw out the creative genius, you have to give it freedom of expression.

To develop the potential in your child, you have to first reorientate your views regarding it. Do not try to fit it into the mould which you think is best. Find out what it is trying to become or hopes to achieve. Do not confuse and brainwash it with all your high-sounding ideas of life. Your views may be biased and your advice tainted by your own victories and defeats. You are simply your child's guardian. You should be there when it needs you. After all, a bird does not teach its young how to fly and find food; it simply gives shelter and protection until they are able to forage for themselves. We should learn from this example, and try to give our children the freedom of the baby bird, so that one day they too may spread their wings and fly high into the sky.

Diet

Today there is great controversy going on about vegetarian and non-vegetarian diet. Although it is not our intention to advocate one way or the other, still it is necessary to deal with this matter, for diet has a direct influence on one's life. The food you eat determines the state of your body and mind and, therefore, diet can help or hinder you from enjoying life to the fullest extent.

If you observe the sexual habits of animals, you will be surprised to observe that herbivorous animals undergo a longer period of coitus. It has been found that in herbivorous animals the sexual act sometimes extends over a period of days, as opposed to carnivorous animals, which have what can be termed 'quick passion'. Dogs, tigers, lions and other animals, which live only on meat, have a very brief sexual response. Elephants, goats, buffaloes and cows, on the other hand, experience sexual stimulation for hours before they proceed to the act itself.

In research studies, non-vegetarian diet has been implicated as a significant factor in sexual incompatibility, which plays a determining role in the outcome of marriage. If either partner is dissatisfied with the sexual relationship, it will create conflicts and tensions in the personality, and that is when marriage beings to fail. In America, marriage counsellors advise partners who have been unable to satisfy each other sexually to alter their diet in order to assimilate

more vegetarian food, as opposed to a high protein non-vegetarian diet.

Biologically and physiologically, a woman is much slower to respond to sexual stimulation. Therefore, in order to satisfy both partners and avoid sexual disharmony, it is necessary to introduce a diet which will sustain and lengthen the duration of the act itself, thereby allowing the passions to be expressed in a more balanced manner.

To be more explicit, sexual satisfaction depends largely on the endurance and sustaining abilities of both partners. Passion that is quickly generated but soon bubbles over is largely due to the influence of a carnivorous diet, whereas slow, steady stimulation of passion, continuing over a greater period of time, is the outcome of a herbivorous diet. You have to choose which suits you the best.

There is also a common misconception that only the protein derived from a meat diet is adequate for human needs. This is a great fallacy for it has been found that, although meat has a larger amount of protein, the assimilation of protein from a proportionate quantity of grain or lentils is far greater. Therefore, although you are eating meat, your body may not be assimilating as much protein as it would from other vegetarian sources.

Moreover, modern methods of rearing and slaughtering animals often result in an end product which is contaminated with various chemicals. Hormones, antibiotics and vaccines are administered to the animals, either in their food or by injection. These remain in the flesh after the animal has been slaughtered and are eaten by the unsuspecting consumer. These toxins are carried throughout our bodies and, in time, create diseases such as cancer, tumour, sclerosis, and so on.

Apart from all the artificially introduced chemicals, the flesh of animals is a wonderful breeding ground for bacteria and germs. This can be dangerous if the meat is not cooked properly. For example, pork meat contains a rare virus which is known to survive even under very high temperatures.

Once this virus enters the human body, it attaches itself to the intestinal walls and begins to expand until it affects the brain, causing loss of memory, dizziness and blackouts. Unless pork meat is sufficiently cooked so as to completely destroy this virus, it can cause severe damage to your health.

Many diseases, such as heart ailments and particularly stress, are largely due to the consumption of animal products. Adrenaline, a powerful hormone and stimulant which is released into the bloodstream during times of emergency exists in large quantities in the meat you consume. We all know that this hormone is produced in a state of fear. When an animal is being slaughtered, a large quantity of adrenaline is pumped into the blood due to the instinctive fear which it experiences. This hormone is retained in the cell tissues and is conveyed to the person who eats the meat. It then acts on the human body and produces the same nervous response as the adrenaline secreted from our own glands, thereby accelerating conditions of fear and stress.

If you take a closer look at the physical structure of the human mouth, you will see that the teeth are quite small and are adapted to foods that are easier to bite and chew. Carnivorous animals have sharp and prominent canine teeth, suitable for killing and tearing flesh. Moreover, the intestinal tract of a carnivorous animal is much shorter than that of a human being, thus allowing the meat to be digested and passed out in a shorter span of time. The length of the intestinal tract of a human being causes the meat to remain in the system for many hours, thereby putrefying and often resulting in an obstruction of bowel movement.

Apart from the physiological factors, there are also psychological factors that are influenced by your diet. It has been observed that a pure vegetarian diet creates greater tranquillity in the mind and emotions. This does not mean that if you eat vegetarian food, you will automatically become calm and tranquil. It only means that by eating certain foods, you are making life calm and smooth for yourself, giving your body and mind the best chance to develop

stability, equanimity and an equipoised personality. Do not consider that as a karma sannyasin or yoga sadhaka, you have to become vegetarian. This is not true. Even though a vegetarian diet is the most beneficial for your health, the decision is solely yours.

One of the basic aims of a karma sannyasin is to develop a higher degree of mental awareness and a greater sensitivity to the physical body and its functions. This automatically brings about mental peace as well as physical relaxation, and it has been observed, not only in the present time, but throughout the ages, that this is most easily achieved with the help of a vegetarian diet. However, I would like to emphasize that if you happen to prefer meat and do not wish to eliminate it from your diet, there is no cause for alarm. Non-vegetarianism is not a barrier to higher awareness, nor is it anti-spiritual. You have to decide for yourself what to eat. Manu, the codifier of law in ancient India, has summed up the situation best suited for an aspirant on the spiritual path: "It is not wrong to eat meat or drink wine. This is a natural urge, but at the same time, if you abstain from them, you will obtain far greater results."

Wealth

In India, wealth is allegorized as being a beautiful young goddess. Her name is Lakshmi, and Indians go to great lengths in order to propitiate her. There is a special festival held every year in the month of October for the goddess Lakshmi called *Deepavali*. It is a festival of lights, and on that day, thorough cleaning is performed, new articles brought and oil lamps burned throughout the night, so that the goddess may be guided to their homes.

Lakshmi stands for prosperity and her entrance into the home is considered to be highly auspicious. It means that you have been favoured. However, although it is relatively easy to entice her into your home for a short time, Indians believe that to make her stay throughout life is a much more difficult task. In order to ensure her benevolence, you have to respect her conditions and maintain the correct attitude towards the wealth she bestows upon you.

We have always been taught that wealth is an evil and that if one is to maintain purity of purpose, it is best to stay away from it. But, on the contrary, wealth in itself is far from dangerous. Rather, it is a necessary commodity in order to live. It is a facility to be enjoyed and utilized in the best possible manner. Wealth is not bad; it is our attitude towards it that breeds danger.

It is a common tendency and failing that the more we have, the more we want. We become covetous and lose all

sense of propriety. Wealth acts as an intoxicant and people become drunk with it. They then begin to fantasize about themselves and their own importance and lose all touch with reality. The desire for wealth induces hankering, craving, jealousy and hatred in most people. It is often observed that with the acquisition of wealth, people lose their goodness, humility and generosity. They are always conscious of their money and feel that others are trying to cheat them. On account of this, life becomes a battle to guard and increase their capital and so they cease to enjoy life.

It is this incapacity to control the desire for wealth that is the cause of its infamy. Wealth in itself is auspicious, a good sign, but it is your attitude towards it that determines whether or not it is going to be a positive influence on your life. Wealth, luxury and comfort are bestowed on you in order to make your life easier and more pleasant, not as a source of depravity and downfall. Instead of viewing it correctly, one becomes drunk with riches and is reduced to a slave. Rather than utilizing the wealth to fulfil your own and others' needs, the greed for wealth begins to dominate you. From being a master, you are reduced to a servant, and live in terror, as all weak servants do. You develop neurosis, anxiety, high blood pressure, insomnia, constipation, indigestion and ulcers, and then your wealth can no longer give you any pleasure, as you become the victim of disease.

In order to understand the correct way of handling wealth, you can draw an example from the sannyasins and sages. Although they may acquire wealth and large institutions, they never regard them as their own. They utilize whatever comes to them in the best possible manner without worrying about it day and night. They are very practical in matters concerning wealth and property, regarding them as necessary for the accomplishment of certain tasks. But apart from that, it has no importance in their lives. They are not dependent on their wealth for happiness and joy. If it leaves them, they can live with the same equanimity and tranquillity as they did earlier.

Wealth is like a flirtatious person. The more you chase after it, the more it will elude you. Learn to utilize wealth without dependence; learn to be indifferent to the pleasures and comforts obtained through wealth. You will then find that all the energies you had expended in the chase were futile, that life can be joyous without a great deal of wealth and property. Only when you learn to be independent of the trappings of wealth will you know the art of deriving the maximum pleasures from the riches you own.

A karma sannyasin has to imbibe the spirit of simple living and high thinking. So much of what you accumulate is unnecessary. The more you acquire, the more subservient you become, until ultimately your life is governed by your acquisition. It is at that time, when the blow will be the severest and hardest to bear, that Lakshmi decides to leave your home. Wealth is a capricious thing, here today and gone tomorrow. Those who love their wealth more than their freedom lose their sanity, for they have become so dependent on it that all their inherent strength is annihilated.

So, as a karma sannyasin, you can and should continue to utilize your wealth in positive ways, but you have to reorient your attitude. You have to be practical and disciplined in matters regarding wealth and property. Use it for yourself and your family by all means; live in luxury and comfort if you wish to, but not at the cost of losing your freedom, which is far more important than all the wealth in the world.

Epilogue

The modern individual has been led to believe that the only way to improve an unpleasant situation is to change it. If the wife does not satisfy you, then change her for another one. If the job is creating tension and conflicts, change it for another one. If the house, car or other commodities are outmoded, change them for newer and more modern ones. Nothing in life is considered to hold any permanent value, and it has become so much so that people are even prepared to change their religious, social and political ideologies in order to find happiness. This is the way of life which has been ingrained into their system.

Today we find that the standard of living has improved tremendously. There are luxurious homes, fast cars, fashionable clothes and enthralling entertainments, but has that solved the real problem of discontentment, dissatisfaction and disharmony which is consuming the individual? No, instead, we find that today man is as much of a misfit, if not more so, than before.

The point to remember, therefore, is that in order to enrich the quality of your experiences, it is necessary to change or transform the quality of your mind, perception and awareness. Without transformation of mind and reorientation of attitude, no amount of external change pertaining to your life will have any lasting effect. You may continue to change your wife or husband, house or car, religion or philosophy,

but you will find that this brings no change in the quality of experience, because the change is merely external. Internally, you are the same person and therefore you will continue to relate to your environment with the same tainted and distorted perception.

Transformation and elevations of internal awareness and perception is the only way to bring about permanent and continued improvement in the quality of your life. So where are you going to begin? You have searched and knocked on many doors, but you have returned defeated and disillusioned. Even your religion has not been able to transform the quality of your experience. Moreover, the faith that most people have in their religion is not born out of a trust and confidence that arises from personal experience. Rather, it is a blind faith which has been handed down by the society, culture and family environment into which one is born. Therefore, it can never work. Real faith has the power to transform an individual, but that faith has to be alive, not dead and burned out. Living faith, which can transform your whole personality and enrich the quality of your life, requires personal experience, which gives birth to trust, dedication and sincerity.

Let us look at the problem from a more practical viewpoint. Most people today are doubters and disbelievers. Therefore, it is no longer possible for them to achieve transformation through the medium of faith. More practical guidelines are necessary, so that one can first of all make an attempt at elevating the quality of the mind. This will spontaneously improve the quality of perception and experience and give far-reaching and more permanent happiness.

The pain and pleasure, happiness and sorrow, defeat and victory that you are experiencing is merely a catalyst. The only purpose it serves is to bring to the surface something which is inside you. If you think that the afflictions you are experiencing are on account of your husband or wife, you are mistaken. If you change them for someone else, in the

course of time, you will find the same afflictions creeping in on you. All over the world the same problems are being experienced. Every family, every individual, has more or less the same difficulties varying only by a few degrees. Perhaps the husband is an alcoholic and disregards the needs of his family, or the husband and wife have too many differences which ultimately lead one or the other of them to extramarital affairs. Or the children are openly defiant of the parents, resorting to drugs, promiscuity and a dissipated lifestyle. Sometimes it is poverty or unemployment that is the source of misery, but even in rich and wealthy families there is grief and anguish.

We have experimented with every facet of life. We have raised our standard of living and become more affluent and sophisticated. We have disregarded our natural heritage and changed everything with the hope that it will bring us more lasting happiness. But we have failed. If there is sorrow, grief and anguish in the worst living conditions, they exist in the best living conditions also. Sickness, suffering, old age and death are visitors to every home. Wealth, name, status and beauty are just temporary visitors in your life. They can only give as much enjoyment as the quality of your mind, body and emotions allow.

The search for happiness is on, but people are looking in the wrong direction. Remember that external life is only a catalyst for your internal growth, and that ultimately it is the inner strength you possess which will ultimately determine your success and happiness in life. If you can develop your inner potential, then your life will be spontaneously transformed into a joyous event.

In order to achieve harmony in life, internal and external growth have to run parallel to each other. Although external life is a necessary step in evolution, one should never forget that it is internal life that forms the substratum or base for the quality of experience. This is precisely what initiation into karma sannyasa reveals, not merely as an abstract philosophy, but as a dynamic and practical way of life.

This book explains many facets of karma sannyasa, but ultimately the truth of these words can only be verified through personal experience and, for that, you will have to take the plunge. The time for taking that plunge is here and now. The decision to improve the quality of your life and mind should be acted on immediately and not shelved for some later time when you find that everything around you is crumbling. Try to pick up the thread which links the events of your life and gives it a definite structure, beauty and purpose, but do it now.

What is there to lose really? You can lose nothing because you have nothing except chains which bind you to ignorance and misery, and loss of ignorance is a gain or a profit. The problem is that people become very attached to their misery also and they guard it like a treasure. If someone tries to take their misery away, they become fearful and suspicious. They create all sorts of barriers such as doubt, disbelief and antagonism. Without their misery and afflictions, they feel empty and so create all sorts of false notions and beliefs to guard their misery.

The choice is yours. You may guard your miseries for the rest of your life, blaming everything around you for your personal unhappiness, or you may find solace and happiness in transforming your body, mind and consciousness through active participation in life as a karma sannyasin. Under the guidance and initiation of a guru, a karma sannyasin can find the answer which has been eluding him or her throughout life.

Do not even consider treading the path without a guru. Throughout history, only a small number of people have successfully completed the spiritual journey without a guru. They are so few, you can count them on your fingers. You cannot apply these examples to your own life because the quality of such people was different. If you wish to achieve success in spiritual life independently, then you should exhibit the same quality of mind, body and spirit as they did. Or else you have to accept your inabilities and limitations

and open yourself to the guidance of someone who knows the way and is only too happy to take you along, if only you are receptive to their words.

You may not be able to understand all this right now, but some day you will. If a person is asleep, the present and the future pass them by. They are dead to them and live only in the past, in the realm of cause, paying little heed to the effect it has on their life. But the person who is awake and aware of present and future circumstances tries to restructure and remould their life by creating a more powerful and permanent effect. The opening is there. You have only to become conscious of it, then you will understand karma sannyasa.

Part Two

Talks given by
Swami Satyananda Saraswati

A New Outlook on Life

Karma sannyasa is not my creation. It is a very old order which has survived through the ravages of time. The purpose of karma sannyasa is to open up the possibility for everyone who is keen to experience the ultimate form of sannyasa while still living the life of a householder.

Sannyasa is the ultimate point of evolution. It is here that you dedicate yourself to the path of enlightenment, wholly and completely. But this is not possible for everybody. You live in this world with your family, children, duties, commitments and attachments. Many times you try to find a meaning, a purpose for your life. This point does not bother everyone, but those of you who are philosophical, analytical and spiritual by temperament sometimes wish to comprehend the purpose of your existence.

You are unable to understand why you are living or working. When you analyze the entire process of your life, you reach a point where everything begins to seem fruitless and meaningless. It is as if you are walking and walking without knowing which way to go and where your path will end. Life appears to be a wilderness – eating, sleeping, enjoying things day after day – that’s all! Sometimes you ask yourself, “Where am I going?” It is then that you start to find a way out of this confusion, out of this spiritual darkness.

As a householder, you have not been taught why you exist. This education should have been imparted to you in

a graduated fashion, from the beginning of your childhood. But you were not told, and that is why you begin to feel an insufficiency and incompleteness in your own life. I don't mean to say that the life of a householder is incomplete, for every person is complete in himself. You have just not realized it, because you have not been told.

For example, you are walking along the road and somebody tells you to go on walking, but you don't know where to go. Your guides should have told you that you have to go to Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta or into the sea, but these leaders kept you in absolute darkness because they themselves did not know the answers. How can the blind lead the blind? They did not have the fundamental knowledge or know the purpose of nature.

Nature, or *prakriti*, has a purpose. By nature, I do not mean the forests, mountains, rivers and oceans. That may be your definition of nature, but philosophically speaking, nature means *prakriti* – that great law, that great system, which is responsible for creation, growth and transformation. There is a universal law which controls the existence, growth and transformation of each and every speck of creation. These are known as the natural laws. They control the nature of plants, the properties of chemicals, the behaviour of invisible waves (magnetic and electromagnetic, etc.), and they control our existence.

That controlling force is called *prakriti*. It is composed of eight elements: ether, air, fire, water, earth, ego, mind and intelligence. These eight make up nature or *prakriti*, which is both individual and universal. It is microcosmic and it is also macrocosmic. In its macrocosmic aspect, it controls numberless galaxies, hundreds and thousands of suns and solar systems, and all the things in the vast universe. In its microcosmic aspect, it controls each and every individual object. So, you have a certain autonomous nature or *prakriti* in you. It comprises all the basic laws by which it can control, not only destiny and movements, but the entire system. It controls the digestive system, respiratory system, and so on.

You have not been told anything about this universal philosophy; you have just been told that there is a God who has created you. But when you try to adjust the whole concept of God logically, you do not understand it and cannot accept it. I know that creation is the quality of nature (prakriti) and not the quality of consciousness (purusha). *Purusha* means 'supreme consciousness, supreme spirit, God'. It is static, uninvolved. It has no name or form. We give it a name only because we have to use some word. You may call it God, someone else may say atma, soul or spirit. The supreme being has millions of names and it has no name at all, and we do not even know its address. If you address a prayer to Him, will you say, God, c/o the universe, or God, c/o some church, or God, c/o some swami?

No, it is not correct. God is neither the creator, preserver or destroyer; neither mother nor father. God is the absolute witness of everything that is happening in this macrocosm and microcosm. This magic, this drama, this great fantastic show which is going on, is the creation of prakriti, and prakriti is another force. Therefore, like the modern day scientist, I believe in the philosophy of duality. There is not one but two forces, and remember that both are eternal. This is the dualism of modern science, and this dualism is the truth.

There are two eternal realities, two eternal processes. One is purusha, which you call the supreme being, and the other is called prakriti or nature. This nature controls our lives and on account of it we are born. Unfortunately, you are not taught all these things, which is why, as householders, you experience meaninglessness, as if you were in total darkness. Often when you dive deep with an analytical mind, you find that everything you are doing is futile, has no purpose, no meaning, no ending, no result. That is why you lose the centre of your existence.

It is for this reason that karma sannyasa has a great significance for people in the world today. Karma sannyasa does not take you away from your present status as a

householder. Karma sannyasa is not a process in which husband is separated from wife or wife is separated from husband or children are separated from parents. No! Karma sannyasa is a process in which you continue your life as a householder, but, at the same time, you realize the purpose of your pilgrimage, the purpose of your journey, of your existence, why you were born and where you are going. That is karma sannyasa.

It is for this purpose that I began to initiate householders into karma sannyasa. I knew that there were very few people brave enough to accept poorna sannyasa, full sannyasa, total sannyasa. Also, if everybody took sannyasa, then there would be a great problem – the process of evolution would come to a complete standstill! If all the boys and girls in school just went straight to the university, into the post-graduate classes, you know what would happen.

No, poorna sannyasa is not for everyone and everyone is not for sannyasa, because in the process of evolution, everybody is not at the same point. Some people are backward and some are forward; some have attachments and some are detached; some have pure minds and some impure minds; some are faltering and some are proceeding.

Therefore, householders must realize that the purpose of nature is to create an experience of enlightenment in everyone's life. But this enlightenment does not come in a single day. It is the ultimate culmination of a fantastic process. Fulfilment of desire, experiencing craving, facing passions, undergoing frustration, getting angry, feeling depressed, experiencing pain, agony and sorrow is the fantastic process which leads you to the pinnacle of evolution.

All the experiences which you have in your day to day life, either within yourself or in relation to other people, events and objects, form a part of the whole process. They are not demonical or evil; they are not detrimental to spiritual evolution. Rather, they form a part of spiritual evolution and, therefore, when you face these things you should not come to the conclusion that life is meaningless. When

everything is comfortable, life has meaning, hasn't it? And when everything is uncomfortable, life seems meaningless, although actually it's not true.

In every situation, you have to face and realize the naked aggression of your nature. You are trying to cover it up. That is what religions have been teaching and that is what modern culture is teaching. Don't get angry; control your passions; don't be jealous. Why shouldn't you be jealous? Don't fear. Why not? You have to face it. Karma sannyasins must remember that they will have to experience, face and accept the naked aggression of their nature.

Where does fear come from? Does it come from outside? No, it is an expression of yourself. You have fear, anger and so many propensities within and that is why you experience them. If you are afraid to face them, then they will find another way to manifest, perhaps through a tumour, cancer, mental breakdown, criminality, suicide, murder, theft, and so on. You cannot control nature; it has to express itself during this existence.

Whatever you are given and whoever you are living with should be considered as tools to discover and express your own nature. Therefore, the life of a householder is a platform where you are expected to purify yourself, not by religion, ethics and morality, but by letting things out. So, karma sannyasins are not supposed to hate anything, including themselves. Nor should they make any change in the structure of their family life.

Many people come for karma sannyasa with completely incorrect notions. Supposing you have come by yourself to take karma sannyasa. When you go back and tell your husband or wife, "I'm a karma sannyasin from today," they will say, "What do you mean by that?" Then you will reply, "Oh, now I have nothing to do with you. I'm going to practise detachment from today. We are living together physically, but mentally I'm detached." These are all wrong ideas! Live life fully and detachment will come; live life by halves and attachment will stay.

What is a full life? You have to experience every quality of your mind, nature and existence. Don't be an idealist; you have to face reality. Of course, I know that there are people who can live a transcendental life while interacting with their family members, but this is not possible for everyone. If you don't live properly, you will disturb your life as a householder and, at the same time, your spiritual life will also be disturbed. After receiving formal initiation into karma sannyasa, however, you will return home with a new understanding of yourself, your relationships and all that you have in your life.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How did you introduce karma sannyasa?

According to the rishis or seers, man's commitments in life are divided into four stages: brahmacharya ashrama, grihastha ashrama, vanaprastha ashrama, and sannyasa ashrama. *Vanaprastha*, the third stage, is a Sanskrit word which literally means, 'going to the forest'. Nowadays this is not possible, so I have suggested another name for vanaprastha ashrama, which is karma sannyasa. Vanaprastha ashrama and karma sannyasa are the same because in karma sannyasa you are trying to renounce karmas, associations and involvements which create a chain of karma.

Sannyasa ashrama is the fourth stage in which you completely dedicate yourself to the discovery of the inner atman or supreme self. In karma sannyasa you have associations in certain limited ways with your husband or wife, children, friends, relatives, job, etc., because you have to sustain yourself. In sannyasa ashrama, however, you have to be free from that which is internal in the form of maya – attachments, desires, mineness, and so on.

Initially, I was not prepared to give karma sannyasa to anyone, although people had been asking me to do so for many years. As you might have noticed, I am not an orthodox person, but I am afraid of one thing: that any good idea, any good purpose which we uphold, degenerates into a sort of

unintelligible sect if it goes to irresponsible people. Karma sannyasa is not a sect, but if it is given to everyone who has not pondered over life, its purpose and their attitude towards it, it will definitely degenerate in the course of time.

When I first went to Europe in 1968, my Western disciples talked to me about this. They wanted me to start a sort of preparatory sannyasa at that time also. In the beginning, I did not agree with this. Then finally, in 1983 I initiated the first French couple into karma sannyasa.

In the ancient books, a karma sannyasin was also known as *sharmaka*, which means a person who resolves to practise total virtue. This is how it started and many people throughout India and the western continent are now taking initiation into karma sannyasa. However, they should still maintain their association with the family, just as I maintain my relationship with my disciples in the ashram or with you, with *anasakti*, a spirit of non-involvement. We must live in the family with a spirit of inner detachment and try to practise this *bhava* or attitude.

What is the principle behind karma sannyasa?

There are many forms of initiation or *diksha* for evolution in spiritual life. One form of initiation is *mantra diksha*, initiation into mantra by guru. When guru gives you a mantra sadhana to practise, that is called mantra diksha, and it is for every aspirant who has even the smallest inclination or minimum aspiration for spiritual growth. Not so much sincerity or aspiration is demanded. Even a little sincerity or aspiration is enough to decide that one should receive a mantra and have a guru. Mantra diksha is for everyone.

Then there are people who are determined to live a different type of life, who have independent beliefs and a faith different from the scriptures, canons, institutions and organizations. They live by their own philosophy, their own faith. They do not depend on matter; they do not depend on emotional relationships or the elements of security. They then take sannyasa from a guru – total renunciation! But

that is only for a very few people and I am not going to talk about it here.

Then there is the third type of initiation or diksha, intended for those who have thought well about the purpose of life, about the possibilities of spiritual illumination in this life itself. They have understood that, even though they are caught up in maya, even though they are caught up in dreams, they can still have the deeper, the greater and abiding spiritual experience. They can understand, discover and realize their own selves, without changing the external things of life, without renouncing external objects. For them, there is the initiation into karma sannyasa.

Karma sannyasa is intended for regular householders, those who are involved in accomplishments; who have a family, children, emotions, fights and quarrels, everything desirable or undesirable – love, passion, greed, property, bank balance, car. But at the same time, they are keen on developing the inner experience. It is for these people that the initiation into karma sannyasa is suggested.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, the disciple asks his guru, “What is renunciation and what does it mean?” The guru replies, “Some people renounce life itself; others renounce the actions but not life, and yet others renounce the fruits of the action and not the action. Still others do not renounce either the action or the fruits accruing from the actions.” What do they renounce? They renounce the doership; they renounce the actorship. They disidentify the ego, which is the most important principle involved in every sphere, in every affair of one’s life.

Disidentification of ego, disidentification of *ahamkara* (I-ness), is very important in the life of a householder, because as householders we undergo various types of experience – happiness, unhappiness, failure, success, sorrow, joy, insult, harassment, loss, gain, frustration, disappointment; we undergo these experiences and every experience disturbs us. Sometimes these experiences not only disturb us, they completely put us out of order and we

don't know how to function further. A nervous breakdown occurs and we make mistakes as a result. We commit suicide, kill somebody or sometimes even escape from life.

The experiences arising out of the events of life dislocate our personality. They disintegrate our personality completely; we are thrown into pieces. But if we are able to disidentify, if we are able to separate from the ego, then the things may happen, because life is a mixture of all experiences, but they will not affect us. Disidentification of ego comes about when you are processing your personality either through a system or through some of the techniques of yoga, as well as through philosophical self-analysis. So, this is the path of karma sannyasa where you are a sannyasin while acting and operating in life.

What is the role of guru in karma sannyasa?

The role of guru is to realize the karma and the total destiny of the disciple. According to that, the guru suggests what the disciple should do. Before the guru teaches the disciple, he will have to discern the level of his evolution and find out to what degree he is attached to worldly things and to what degree he can transcend them. That is the main role of the guru in the life of a disciple. Just as a jeweller scrutinizes a jewel, similarly, the guru analyzes the total karma, destiny, nature and potential quality of the disciple.

The disciple then allows the guru to handle his ego. If you allow me to handle your ego, then I can tell you what to do, otherwise not, because the ego is very hard stuff. It is the basis of your individuality. You are different from me because of the ego. If you remove your ego, then there is no difference; we are one. Sometimes in an individual there are two egos. When you have two egos, you will find difficulty in adjusting with yourself. In the same way, I have an ego and you have an ego. Therefore, we are two and not one.

A disciple should withdraw his ego so that the guru can understand him. Without removing the ego, it is not possible for the guru to understand the disciple. The ego is like a

hard shell and if I want to penetrate into you, I can't because you are closed. Therefore, in spiritual life or for karma sannyasa, the guru-disciple relationship is not only most important, it is the only important thing.

Could you please talk about the tantric disciple?

A tantric disciple is an evolved soul. He has already accomplished a lot of spiritual things in his previous incarnations. He is not raw material; he is almost a finished product. He becomes a disciple in order to be the link, in order to be the medium for the energy of his guru. Just as electricity is conducted through wires, poles, switchboards etc., the guru's energy and knowledge are conducted to various corners of the world by his tantric disciples.

Crossing the Threshold

We are at the threshold of two levels of evolution, remember it! We are at the threshold of the natural evolution from animal to spiritual evolution in the human body. We are at the junction and therefore karma yoga, which concerns our daily lives, is an important yoga.

Involvement with daily life is karma yoga. Involvement with your partner, children, friends and enemies; with your business, wealth and kitchen; with your lock and key, bank balance; with your radio, transistor and television set; with your games, fun, frolics; with your thoughts, passions, ambitions, jealousies, hatred, greed – that is karma yoga. That is life! You understand this life very well because you are at the beginning of spiritual evolution. You are crossing the threshold of natural evolution and entering the domain of spiritual evolution. You are gross. You are on the gross plane.

Of course, when you have transcended the gross plane, and many of you may have done it, that is a different matter. Then you can completely get out of karma yoga and practise raja yoga, bhakti yoga, jnana yoga – whatever you like. But, at this moment, when you are aware of those things in life which are material, gross and sensual in nature, which are objective, diversified and dissipated in nature, it is necessary for you to practise karma yoga.

Involve yourself with the life which you understand, which you can catch hold of, which you can handle, which is not

beyond your mind and with which you are concerned at every moment. Through the practice of karma yoga, you are not only creating an act, you are also disposing of an act. When you sow a seed, you are trying to create a plant, but you are disposing of the seed as well.

It is important to know that a human being has millions and trillions of archetypes in his brain which he has inherited from his animal grandfathers – monkeys, elephants, dogs, horses. They were producing seeds of karma. They were creating impressions and producing habits and experiences. They were creating ripples in the ocean of life. When a dog barks, it is creating. When a horse neighs, it is creating. When a fish moves in the water, it is creating. Do you understand what creation is? Creation is movement.

Karma is not merely confined to human beings. Every sentient and insentient being on earth is subjected to the law of karma. Karma relates to the movement of life, it is not merely coming in and going out, and driving a car. That is one karma, of course, but karma is related to the flow or movement of life, not only in relation to a human being, but also in relation to a fish, horse, donkey, pony or even a tree. They are all controlled by the law of karma. They are performing karma. They are creating an effect because, if there is a cause, there has to be an effect. No effect is final and no cause is primary. The effect becomes the cause and the cause is an effect of some karma. So, the law of causation, the chain of cause and effect, relates to every seen and unseen object in the universe.

The things which you see are visible, but there are invisible things as well which you do not see. These invisible events and objects are also creating karma. Karmas are stored in the form of microscopic seeds, atoms or units. Your brain contains millions and trillions of archetypes, called samskaras. They are the products of experiences in life, the product of karma. These archetypes are the seeds of lives which you have undergone in various incarnations from invisible to visible. You may not understand this yet.

As human beings, you are a transformed substance, but you have not always been human beings. You have existed for millions and millions of years in different forms. Yes, that is a scientific conclusion. It is not theology that I am talking about. I am not talking about religion. I am not talking about a philosophy. You have existed for millions and millions of years in different forms. The transformation, metamorphosis, or 'getting out' of one incarnation into another incarnation, is the law of matter; the law of creation.

Creation is never static. Trees are not going to remain trees. Human beings are not going to remain human beings. Stones are not going to remain stones. How can it be? The universe is not static; energy is not dead matter. Creation is not dead matter; it is a force. Creation is movement; it is not static. Where there is creation, there is energy and transformation. Where there is creation, there is destruction, disintegration, transformation and metamorphosis.

So, we are a bundle of millions and trillions of experiences which we have inherited from our previous incarnations. What are we going to do with them? Tell me, have you a way? Has there been any religion in the world in the last twenty thousand years which has shown a way? Religion has shown us a way to pray. I can also pray. I can fold my hands and say, "God, forgive me," but that is not enough. Is there any system which teaches us how to get these archetypes out, these millions and trillions of experiences embedded in the layers of our existence?

It is in this particular light that I teach yoga because, when you sit for meditation with your legs interlocked in the lotus posture, with your spine upright and straight, eyes closed and inner gaze fixed, the mind becomes overactive. Am I wrong? When you watch television, the mind is so quiet; when you watch a cricket match, everything is so nice. The mind does not create a problem. When you hate someone, the mind does not create a problem.

However, when you want to become quiet, you are most unquiet and a storm begins to break, thought after thought.

If you do not control these impulses and thoughts, if you do not know how to release them for months and months at a time, you will not be able to remember your mantra; you will not be able to remember your symbol.

Just as you take a purgative and go to the toilet and go and go until everything is out, in the same way, in order to get rid of these karmas and experiences which you have stored within you, you have to take a strong purgative. The strong purgative, in my opinion, is mantra. Not television, that is constipating because it suppresses all the fluctuations and you don't remember anything. But when you take your mantra and your mala and say *Om, Om, Om . . .*, everything comes out.

Very small things, insignificant things, disturb the concentration when you are doing *japa*. You wonder if you have switched off the light or not, whether the kitchen door is locked, where the baby has gone. All kinds of very insignificant things. Sometimes you wonder how these things that come into the mind during the initial practice of meditation are effective and what role they play, what place they have in your life. You may say, "No, they have no place in my life," but they do. Each and every experience, insignificant though it may seem to be, is very important. These impressions have all to come out, and that is why it is said in the scriptures, "Empty thyself."

In order to empty yourself physically, you take a purgative. In order to empty yourself mentally, you have to pop a different pill, and the name of that pill is mantra. The mantra you receive from your guru is the pill which brings out the karma. In addition to the mantra, there is another pill, and the name of that is karma yoga. Karma means action. In your day to day life, your activities, the actions to which you are exposed, are necessary for your evolution. Therefore, seventy percent of one's life must be karma yoga.

What is karma yoga? Is everybody a karma yogi? No. Karma yoga is a special way of dealing with the events and realities of life. You do not deal with your life like a

fool. What is your relationship with life? How far can that relationship go? How much effect and counter-effect of the karma have you to accept? What should your attitude to relationships be? What should your relationships be to the affairs of life which are very happy or very tragic? What should your relationship be to your own personality? These things are important to know.

How should you deal with your own self? I am not talking about your wife or children, money, family, property, job, business or industry. No. How should you deal with yourself, with your faith, idiosyncrasies, ignorance, wisdom? If you are wise, should you become egoistic? If you are stupid, should you feel inferior? If you are full of jealousy and dislikes, should you hate yourself? If you are passionate, ambitious or mean, should you feel guilty about it? If you are angry, should you repent? If you love, should you become insecure? If you are sick, should you be afraid of death? What should your relationship be with yourself?

That is the most important part of karma yoga. This self-analytical awareness comes when you become a karma sannyasin. It is this type of person who is a karma sannyasin. I am telling you, this is karma sannyasa. An ignorant person is working. A wise person is working. An average person is working. An ambitious person is also working. Then where is the difference? The difference is in the quality of your philosophy of karma. How far, in which way, and why do you relate to a particular level of action and involvement?

Suppose I am angry. I get angry with my wife or my child or with anyone and, after an hour, I am down and depressed. I am so sorry. I should not have done it. This is the way I am dealing with myself. I have lost my business; the capital is gone. I am bankrupt and I know that my children and wife will not be proud of me anymore. Maybe my children will go away and my wife will say, "Give me a chit now and I'll go," How should I deal with myself at that time?

I have a flourishing business from trade and industry. I am a big magnate. I have shares in many companies. I am

a big partner and director. How should I deal with myself? How far should my involvement with karma capture me? Should I be profoundly egoistic? I am a big man. I have so many things. I can do this; I can do that. Now I am going to get a share in a big company in America and then I shall send my people to Russia and export.

You see, this is how we get involved with life, so much so that life captures us and one day we find that we are completely in the hands of destiny. We do not control destiny; destiny controls us. We do not control life; life controls us. When we are under the dictates of destiny, when we are captured by the onslaughts of life, we have heart attacks, high blood pressure, insomnia and cancer. However, a karma sannyasin is a one who has become aware of the effects of life, very alert and careful that the virus of life is not unleashed. We must be free from the virus in order to cross over the spiritual threshold with freedom and ease.

The Tiger and the Sheep

We are all a part of higher consciousness, but we have lost that awareness and have been wandering in the world of the senses. We have totally forgotten our true identity. We think that we are Mr, Mrs or Miss So and So; Hindu, Muslim, Christian or Jew; French, English, German or Russian, etc. But this is not our real identity. We are not just a man or a woman; not just what we feel or think ourselves to be. We only think this way because we have lived with our senses, with the objects of the world, and have identified ourselves with that. There is a story which illustrates this.

Once a shepherd caught a tiger cub. That cub lived with the shepherd and moved with the sheep for many years, so naturally it began to behave like them. When the shepherd whistled, it came running to the fold and thus sheep and tiger lived together as one. One day when the sheep were grazing in the forest, another tiger saw them and thought, "What is this, a tiger living amongst sheep?" So it called the sheepish tiger away from the fold and asked it, "Why are you grazing with the sheep?" The tiger replied, "I am a sheep." "Are you crazy?" asked the other tiger, "You are a tiger like me." But the sheepish tiger exclaimed, "Don't cheat me. You are trying to misguide me. This shepherd is my master and these sheep are my brothers, sisters, uncles and aunts."

The newcomer persisted, "Look here, you are just like me. I have stripes of black and gold and you have stripes of

black and gold. My teeth are sharp and so are yours. I have long whiskers and so have you. I have sharp claws and you have sharp claws.”

But still the sheepish tiger could not be convinced and it bleated, “No, you are trying to exploit me. You are trying to become my guru. I’m going. Don’t call me again. You want me to leave my relatives! Go away.”

Now, the other tiger was in a real quandary as to how it could have happened that a tiger was identifying with sheep. It reasoned that maybe a goat, a calf or even a horse could do so, but there is absolutely no similarity between a sheep and a tiger. A tiger has a completely different nature from a sheep. One is carnivorous and the other is herbivorous. One has sharp teeth and the other has flat teeth. One is dynamic by nature, while the other is passive. One has claws and the other has hoofs. But still the identification had taken place.

So, it decided to show the sheepish tiger its real identity. All of a sudden it stood up and roared. Immediately the whole forest became quiet. The shepherd and his sheep took to their heels, but the sheepish tiger did not run away. So that other tiger roared again even more loudly and this time the sheepish tiger felt like roaring too.

This is exactly what happens to all of us. This awareness of being a tiger and not a sheep is what develops in karma sannyasa. The idea of being a sheep and not a tiger is religion. Every religion today has become more or less ritualistic. There are too many ceremonies and there is almost nothing practical in any religion. The only thing that religion teaches us is how to make marriages and conduct health ceremonies and baptisms. If you ask the religious leaders how to transcend the mind, they know nothing.

When religion teaches you how to reunite, which is what the word religion means, then it is yoga. But when it teaches you the ceremonies, then it becomes a sect. One will say, “Marriage must be conducted this way.” Another will disagree and say, “No, it must be conducted that way.” This is how sects are born, and all sects are the same. When religion

forgets its purpose, it develops into sects, but when it teaches you how to reunite with your real nature, then it is yoga.

It is the duty of religion to teach everybody how to realize the higher self. Places of worship should become places of practical experience and religious people should be those with spiritual experience. Only in this way can religion become a true way for the realization of your real nature.

When religions were discovered by the great saints and yogis, they had the same spirit in their minds as I am talking about today. Sages, saints and realized people do not preach religion; they do not teach sectarianism. They teach reality. Therefore, as a karma sannyasin, you can belong to any religion or you can belong to none. The important thing is not to be bound by religious beliefs but to try and make the spiritual vision a reality in your everyday life, and to identify yourself more and more with that reality.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Could you please explain further the rishis giving us 84,000 asanas to enable us to pass through all the stages of evolution?

The rishis have said that there are 8.4 million embryos. For example, an ant has an embryo, a frog has an embryo and every animal has an embryo through which to create. This means that the individual consciousness has passed through 8.4 million embryos in the course of evolution and therefore there are 8.4 million postures, each one representing one stage of evolution. We have all assumed different postures in our various incarnations.

After assuming human birth, physical evolution comes to an end and spiritual evolution begins. Thus man will always be born as a human being but he will be born as a different kind of human being with higher and higher spiritual awareness. When the individual being has assumed human birth, his evolution continues on the level of the senses, mind, intellect, emotions and the self.

The biological evolution of the individual self is controlled by the laws of nature because animals, including humans, have no control over their biological laws. But when you are born as a human being with a mind, you have control over your spiritual evolution. This means that you do not have to depend anymore on nature's grace; you can complete your evolution in one lifetime if you choose. A dog, an ant, an elephant, has to wait but not a human being.

With evolution, something special has emerged, called awareness of one's own self in relation to time and space. When you are frightened you know that you are frightened and you know that you know that you are frightened. This is self-awareness, called *jnanam* in Sanskrit. Man can think, he knows he is thinking, and he knows that he knows he is thinking. A monkey also thinks sometimes, but it does not know that it thinks.

Jnanam has to be developed more and more. As well as being aware that you are thinking, seeing, or walking, you should also know that there is something beyond this. Animals do not believe in God, nor do some people, but there is a difference. A man knows that he doesn't believe, he knows why he doesn't believe and he tries to discover what the truth is.

According to the rishis, human birth is the final one. They also say this is our greatest opportunity and if we utilize jnanam, we can evolve very fast, maybe in this lifetime. So we don't have to worry about the 8.4 million steps, we are in the last year of the university.

Why should we speed up the process of evolution by practising yoga? Isn't this going against nature's way?

Nature's laws are flexible. Nature is not a military dictator. Nature has certain laws and you can participate in those laws. You can accelerate the speed of your evolution according to the laws of nature. You are not opposing them by participating in them. For instance, say you have a sixty or one hundred watt bulb but you want more light, what do you do?

You take a holder, adapt it, and then connect the cable. But if you have a very big machinery plant which requires three kilowatts of energy and you connect it with that, all the lines will get fused. So, opposing the laws of nature is not good, but you can participate in these laws.

Nature has the possibility of acceleration within its system. An example of accelerating the laws of nature is the conversion of uranium into nuclear energy. Before uranium is converted into nuclear energy, it has to fulfil many conditions of transformation. If you know what those conditions are, uranium can be immediately turned into nuclear energy. Uranium is matter. It has within itself the nucleus of potential energy. It is a type of protomatter. It has space and time, plus and minus energy. In the centre is the nucleus, which we call matter.

Even if you do not produce nuclear energy from uranium, during the course of two or three billion years it will naturally begin to radiate nuclear energy. However, if the process which ordinarily takes place in uranium matter over three billion years is known by man, then he can accelerate it. This is not opposing nature, it is only exploiting the laws of nature. Similarly, practising yoga is not opposing nature, but exploiting and utilizing the natural laws. Allowing evolution to go along at its natural speed is ignorance of these laws.

Is there an end to human development or evolution?

Human evolution is infinite like a circle. Is there an end to a circle? Itzak Bentov, a scientist who was behind many new and revolutionary discoveries, wrote a book called *Stalking the Wild Pendulum*. In it he agrees completely with this concept. At the ultimate point of evolution an individual goes out of the structure and becomes the creator.

Such individuals are called the junior creators. Gurus are junior creators. When their evolution has reached a certain point, they come out. This is also how evolution takes place in the material universe. When the energy evolves, at

a particular point of evolution it issues forth and becomes another creative energy. We call it co-creator energy. This is the theory of avatars and gurus.

There are many mysteries in this life and our generation is not going to unveil them all. We must first develop proper channels of expression to reveal these mysteries and increase our capacity to understand them.

Once we have acquired knowledge of our true self, our true essence, how can we acquire the consciousness of its eternity? In what way is eternity reconcilable with individuality and how is this related to reincarnation?

Eternity and individuality are not two different things. Individuality is one stage of manifestation. In a generating station you generate electricity and that electricity manifests itself in many forms. Is this light electricity? The answer is both yes and no. It is a manifestation of that energy. In the same way, individuality is a manifestation of eternity.

When you experience eternity in samadhi, you experience totality, but you come down again to the world of individuality. As long as you have karma you will come down because every individual has a destiny and obligations to fulfil. You have desires, you have passions, you have karma. Even if you experience eternity, you will come down to fulfil those obligations.

It happens to everybody and, therefore, all liberated people come down to the level of individuality and live among us as evolved souls. But when all the karmas are finished and your obligations are over, then you do not return. That is called *moksha*, *nirvana* or liberation.

Another important point you must remember is that incarnation and reincarnation will always take place. The cycle will end only with ultimate moksha. If you take a flower seed and sow it, it will grow. There will be a few more flowers. Those flowers will also create seeds, again they will grow and in this way keep on growing. However, if you take the seeds and fry them, and then sow them again, they won't grow.

Thus the process of reincarnation comes to an end when there is no more karma.

Every desire is like a seed; every thought is potential; every attachment is powerful, and they bring us back again and again. Every day you go back to your shop; every day you go back to your work. Why? Because you have obligations. If you have no obligations, you won't go back. Therefore, our individual soul will come, incarnating again and again, as long as it has obligations.

The Blossoming of Spiritual Awareness

Spirituality is manifested throughout man's life, right from the time he is conceived until the time he dies. The first part of his life is concerned with education, study; physical, mental and emotional growth. The second part is spent working out the innate karmas, expressing the emotions, passions, desires, fears and agonies which are deeply imbedded in the primitive mind. The third part is the development of spiritual awareness, which is beyond the body, mind and emotions. When spiritual awareness is established, he says a final goodbye to most of the things in life to which he was committed for over five or six decades, and plunges into deep spiritual adventures.

These four stages of life were known to our ancestors as ashramas. The first ashrama was known as *brahmacharya ashrama*, in which he studied, lived an intellectual life and developed the body, mind and emotions up to twenty-five years of age. After this, he married and had children, property and obligations. That was known as the life of a householder. When he was passing through the second stage of life, the *grihastha* or householder ashrama, he was expressing, releasing, and working out his karmas in the form of passions, desires and ambitions, as well as experiencing the agonies, happiness, fears, frustration, hatred, jealousy and thousands of other traits that belong to the lower mind, to tamoguna and rajoguna.

The lower nature, in the form of tamas and rajas, was being released through his association with the objects of this world. Through the involvement of his ego with every situation, person and experience in life, the lower, dormant nature came out. Even as you take a laxative and all the dirt and filth in your intestines comes out, in the same way, the life of a householder was designed, not merely to waste away the time, but to throw out the rajasic and tamasic properties, the dark properties of nature. Therefore, you involved yourself in everything, and by the involvement of ego with many things in life you were working out your karmas.

You must remember that without working out these crude and gross karmas, you cannot experience the light that is in you. First clean the mirror, then you can see your face; clean the globe of the bulb and then the light shines through. Thus, within man also the dross has to be cleaned, and that was the purpose of grihastha or householder ashrama.

As a householder, when you have begun the purging of karmas, you don't have to treat the psychological problems which you undergo now and then – let them be! If there is fear in you, face it; don't try to eliminate it. The more you try to remove it, the more you are suppressing it. If you have passions, don't suppress them through religious morality and puritanism. Let them be – express them! If you have hatred and jealousy, don't say it is bad. It may be both 'bad' and 'good'.

If you have jealousy, if you have hatred, that is in you. You haven't imported it; it is a part of your personality and you are working it out. It is coming out like a boil. When it is time for it to come up, let it come! Why do you suppress it? Why do you go to a doctor and tell him your mental problems? What can he do? He will ask: Have you a father? Have you a mother? What does he do? What does she do? What is your profession? – one hundred and eight monotonous questions, so many that you may get better or you may not, but he gets sick after a few years. He has to ask the same questions to every patient. Do you sleep at night? Do you drink? What are

your hobbies? Do you like this game? Do you like that game? Do you sleep on your stomach or on your back? Or do you sleep on the right side or on the left?

No! This is not the correct approach. There is nothing in life which has to be cured. Everything has to be expressed. Just imagine a person without fear, jealousy, hatred, ambition, desires and passions – he would be an idiot! It is only in the sattwic state that you become fearless and transmit fearlessness to others. You are not afraid of anyone and nobody is afraid of you. You give love; you are charitable and compassionate. You have no enemy; everyone is your own self.

However, if you try to tell people that they should behave like this now, you will create confusion in society, because there will only be a few people who are capable of practising it without suppression. How many of you can truly say, “I have no passion, no ambition?” And what about the rest? They will be exploited and killed. This is how one has to understand the purpose of karma yoga in relation to the evolution of consciousness.

Desires and passions are not evil. They are expressions of your own consciousness in relation to your spiritual evolution. When you were a child you had no beard or moustache, but when you grew up you developed them. You don't worry about it. The experiences which you face in your day to day life, on the mental, emotional and intellectual plane, or even, let us say, on the demonical plane, indicate the evolution of your consciousness, and if you suppress them, your spiritual progress will be retarded. If you express them, your spiritual progress advances. But for how long does this happen?

There comes a moment in the life of a householder, when these traits become feeble and you begin to step into another area of awareness, beyond jealousy, greed, hatred, fear and passion. Not that you have overcome them, they are still very much there. They are part of your being, but at the same time, you have stepped into another dimension called self-awareness or *atma anubhuti*. *Atma anubhuti* means experience of a deeper substance, a deeper element, a deeper stage of

your personality, which is much subtler than the body, mind and emotions.

When you become aware of that, as a householder, you will have to step out of your regular, continued involvement with events such as fear, jealousy and greed. You don't have to leave your home; just step out of your involvement. Until then, please face the test, please bear with all the tragedies of your personality and life. If you face them, later in spiritual life, the growth of your spiritual experience will be faster.

Often people sit for quiet meditation. They are very sincere, but the moment consciousness is withdrawn, as contact is lost with external consciousness, fear creeps in. Many people have felt it and are scared of that experience. They begin to feel as if someone is standing behind them, and that brings on fear. During this stage of spiritual life, when the internal awareness begins to develop, there is an excess of passion, jealousy and fear. You find this many times with spiritual aspirants. Many people even ask me, "Swamiji, after taking to spiritual life, why am I becoming more jealous; why am I becoming like an animal?" It happens because you always suppressed these natural expressions of the mind.

Once you step out of this and become aware of a different area of your personality, called *atma*, the self, the spiritual awareness, then you must reorganize and reform your entire life. You don't have to leave your spouse. You don't have to throw away your children; you don't have to sell your house and sleep in the streets. No! You have to reorganize your involvement in and commitments to daily events and impressions. That is called *karma sannyasa* or householder *sannyasa*.

In ancient days it used to be different. When husband and wife came to this point, both left their hearth and home and went to live in a forest. They built a small cottage and followed a spiritual discipline or *sadhana*, but nowadays it is very difficult to do this. First of all, you have no forests, and secondly, if you have them, they are under the control of big organizations. So naturally, you have to create a forest within your own surroundings.

This concept of householder or karma sannyasa indicates the blossoming of spiritual awareness. The manifestation of a spiritual ideal in the life of a householder who has already had a bit of experience is what karma sannyasa is all about. In the same way as you have experience of the body, mind and psychological problems, even as you have the experience of happiness and agony, you can have an intimate experience of that spiritual stuff that is within you. This means that whenever you feel ready to plunge yourself into incessant and sincere spiritual practice you are qualified for householder sannyasa.

Every karma begets karma; this is the law of causation. A seed is sown, a tree is born. Then again it throws off seeds and more trees are born. The law of karma applies to everybody, except the person who has withdrawn his ego from day to day participation. The principle of householder sannyasa is based on this. A householder who is not aware of this principle is constantly creating karma and undergoing the consequence of it. There is an unending chain of cause and effect. Why? Because, as a mere householder, he has been involving his ego with every impression, every experience, every event and every person, and due to the involvement of ego, the karma creates a law of causation – cause and effect.

The householder, however, tries his best to detach his ego from participation. He works in the office, in the kitchen, on the farm, in the ashram; he works through his mind, body, senses, intellect and emotions, but not through his ego. This ego principle is important in relation to you and your karma. Once you are able to withdraw the ego, the karmas no longer belong to you. That is called karma with detachment or selfless karma.

Many of you come to the ashram and work in the garden, the kitchen, in construction, but that does not produce karma for you because here your participation is physical, intellectual, mental, emotional and through the senses, but there is no ego involvement. The results accruing from these activities do not belong to you. You suffer from the consequences of

karma, because you have always involved yourself. The loss is yours and the profit is yours. Death belongs to you and birth belongs to you because you have involved yourself in your personal life.

There are two ways of dealing with life and that is the central theme of the *Bhagavad Gita*. One is through attachment; another is through detachment. When you approach life with attachment, there is total involvement of ego, but when you approach life with detachment, there is total involvement with everything except ego. Therefore, ego is the principle which is responsible for the law of causation. If there is no ego involvement, then the karma belongs to you, but not the fruits, not the results.

A householder sannyasin must get ready for this. Instead of renouncing the karma, the people to whom he is close, duty, money, property, children, love and passion, he has to separate that principle called ego. This is a simple principle, but it is very significant in the life of a karma sannyasin.

I can give you an example. I had a friend who worked in the government treasury. Every day he used to deal with thousands and thousands of rupees. One morning, when he went to the treasury at about ten o'clock, it was reported that during the night some thieves had broken in and taken about twenty thousand rupees. I don't know how far this news affected him, perhaps not at all, because the money did not belong to him. It was only the process of taking and giving the money that did not belong to him, and as long as his papers and registers were in order, everything would be all right. It did not matter to him who took the money. He came home in the evening a little bit worried, that was all.

Some time later, the same man was going to the market to make some purchases. He had twenty-five rupees in his pocket and somebody stole it! He lost his head! He didn't know what to do; he had to return home. On the way he stood up in the rickshaw and abused the rickshaw driver for not driving well. When he got home he was cross with his wife, child and everybody else. All this over the loss of

the twenty-five rupees that belonged to him, not the twenty thousand rupees which had belonged to the treasury.

A philosophical relationship is that which we develop towards an object or a person on account of our definite values. The twenty-five rupees belonged to him, but the twenty thousand rupees did not. So, the loss of the treasury money did not create a karma; it did not stir his mind and disturb him, even though it was a large amount. But the loss of his twenty-five rupees completely unbalanced his personality. I believe he also developed high blood pressure, and if he had been a weak person and had the sum been greater, he would have had a nervous breakdown as well.

This is how a householder sannyasin, and one who wants to step into the life of householder sannyasa, must prepare himself. He is going to have to reassess and reorganize his relationship with each and everything he is living with, including loss of money, wife or husband, the untimely death of a child, and all kinds of social and political difficulties he may have to face. With this reorganization, he can then become a householder sannyasin and start his spiritual practice, and the growth of spiritual awareness will be very fast.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How can we stop karmas and samskaras from entering the subconscious and unconscious mind?

Why try to do it? Why waste your time? You will only remove the samskaras for something else to come in. It is like being in a railway station or airport, one plane coming, another going. It is the same with the samskaras. Can you close your eyes to them? As long as you are centred in the mind, in the nature of your experience, or in your desires, how can you stop the samskaras?

Rather than blocking the samskaras, please stop your production of them. But you cannot stop producing samskaras; consciously and unconsciously you produce them. So, instead of blocking the samskaras, interfering with them

or trying to eliminate them, it would be much better if you developed, created or initiated stronger samskaras. Thus the positive will overcome the negative.

When you try to develop the inner experience, you are developing strong samskaras. It is possible to fix the samskaras, but for the majority of people it is dangerous, because sometimes in the effort of fixing and adjusting, pacifying and eliminating the samskaras, you eliminate your whole personality and develop a very abnormal personality.

Whether it is through mantra, yantra or tantra, or religious practices, please do not make the mistake of fighting with samskaras. You will only be disturbing the structure of trillions of archetypes in your brain. What are you going to do with these archetypes? Be positive; don't fight with the base of life. You are not even quite sure if there are samskaras there at all. You may be just a machine – who knows? If so, somebody must be running this machine. Do motor cars have samskaras? Maybe you are also like that. You can't be sure.

So, please don't go by faith and belief alone. Be sure that you do not make a mistake in life. Go the sure way. The surest way is to develop a higher, more noble and sublime attitude to life and then all these positive samskaras will follow you. As I have said, all will be transformed in the course of time. You don't have to kill samskaras. You don't have to destroy the base of your existence. This is a destructive way you are talking about. Remove vasanas, the latent desires and passions? Destroy your samskaras and exhaust your karma? What are you talking about? It's not possible! Do it if you can; I cannot do it. I am moving along with my demons.

Does the elimination of the negative traits such as hate, jealousy, greed, envy, etc. mean that a householder is a yogi? Is that purification of the mind or is there another way to purify the mind?

When you practise yoga a transformation takes place in the mind. Even if you do not practise yoga, this transformation will take place in the course of time. However, there are

many religions in the world which say you should not have these negative tendencies, because religions know very well that as long as you have these negative tendencies, there will be no peace upon earth. All the historical crises that have taken place in the world were due to jealousy, anger and greed. Therefore, it is necessary to treat a person's mental and emotional illness because the effects of this illness do not merely affect him, they affect the whole of humanity.

In Islam these negative traits are discouraged. Buddha also said the same thing. So most saints, prophets and swamis emphasize this particular aspect of life, and even if we go to families, we tell them not to get angry or jealous. But sometimes, even if religions preach this to you, you cannot put it into practice. Your religion might be telling you not to be jealous, not to have negativity and you definitely accept this, but still you cannot help it. It is at this time that yoga has to be brought in to sublimate these negative tendencies. By sublimating them through yoga, you can help yourself by bringing about a change, if not in the psychological patterns, at least in what we call the biological patterns.

Sometimes an imbalance in the endocrinal glands changes the whole structure of the mind. Balance between the pineal and pituitary glands can bring about a maturity of the thinking process, and sometimes a change in the brainwave patterns can also bring peace and tranquillity. So we should try all the methods in order to get rid of these negative traits, whether they are religious or yogic. That is important. If you can manage with your religion, well and good. If your religion can give you peace of mind, so much the better, but if you sometimes are not able to handle the difficult processes of religion, then you must add yoga.

Can a householder become sattwic?

A householder can be predominantly sattwic but not totally sattwic. The mind is controlled by the three qualities or gunas. When you are in balance, that is called sattwic. When you are aggressive, violent, ambitious, dynamic, moving, etc.,

that is called rajasic. When you are indolent, lazy, lethargic, procrastinating, that is called tamasic. Tamasic, rajasic and sattwic are the three stages of mind.

Let us say that the evolution of the mind has five stages: the dull mind, the scattered mind, the oscillating mind, the one-pointed mind and the controlled mind. This is the order of evolution. The controlled mind and the one-pointed mind are called the sattwic mind, and such a person is sattwic no matter who he is, householder or sannyasin.

The scattered and oscillating mind is the rajasic mind, the split mind with conflicts. Oscillating mind means it comes to the point and goes away from the point, comes to the point and goes away from the point, like a pendulum. A person with such a mind is rajasic.

The tamasic mind is a dull mind. If you sit for meditation, you begin to sleep. If I am talking about God, bhakti yoga, jnana yoga or raja yoga, you sleep, but if I start talking about some movie or television show, you are wide-awake. This is called a dull mind. Lazy, dull minds are always indifferent to spiritual influxes and actions, but to sensualities they are up, up, up, always. You can say anything to them about sensuality and they are very much alive. They reflect on the past. Reflection on the past, anticipation of the future and dissatisfaction with the present are three non-yogic activities.

So, householders can become sattwic, but not totally because they have a mind which has to attend to the rajasic influxes such as passions, complexes, inhibitions, frictions and conflicts, acceptance and rejection about family life, society, religion and nation. A householder is not an independent individual, he is related to the family, society, nation, religion and his spiritual self. Naturally, it is very difficult for him to become totally sattwic. Even if he is a liberated person, still he gets a little bit of a shock from maya.

Initiation Day

When you are born for the first time from your mother's womb, you breathe the fresh air of life and thereby you grow physically. Most people have only one birth in a lifetime, and that is their physical birth or incarnation. After sixty or eighty years, they leave the body and that is physical death. So, most people have a physical birth and a physical death. All of you, however, have decided to have a second birth and also a second death, both spiritual. Initiation into karma sannyasa, with encouraging, inspiring and promising resolves for improving the quality of your day to day existence, is your second birth, the spiritual birth. This is the birth of the spiritual baby. Later, when you have attained inner awareness and transcended name and form and empirical identity in deep meditation and samadhi, that will be your second death, and that death will make you immortal. That is why St John of the Cross said, "By God, I swear I die every night."

Do we die every night? No, we are born once and we die once, then again we are born and again die. But in this second birth, the baby which is born is a very tiny spirit, much smaller than a point or bindu. It is very dim, and it is in the form of a very tiny awareness in all of you. That point which is now being born in you in the form of a tiny awareness is the nucleus of your future existence, your spiritual life. When one is born, one does not all of a sudden grow into a child or a young man or woman. It takes time to

grow up, even physically. In the same way, this tiny seed of higher resolves and promises will take time to reach maturity.

The path which you have trodden up to now was amidst flowers, pleasures, sensualities, desires, 'haves' and 'have-nots'. The path which you will now tread is the razor's edge. It is not the path of so-called 'pleasure'. Although you will continue to live in the body, operate through the organs and senses, think through the mind and belong to the same family, nation or society, your spiritual identity is now different. This spark of illumination may take many years to develop; it may take many incarnations. So, do not worry about it. As long as you maintain continuity of the same inspiration and freshness of resolve which you are experiencing today, it will grow.

The mind is unstable; it changes every now and then. Sometimes the mental sky is clouded and sometimes it is bright. From time to time, this instability of mind will pull you back into the primitive realm of existence to which you previously belonged. But if you analyze, contemplate and reflect, you will definitely be able to resurrect your inspiration and promises. Remember, anything that is spiritual never dies. The seed of spiritual inspiration is immortal. It may be eclipsed for some time, but it is never dead; it is only dormant.

The maya, *avidya* or ignorance which follows man like a shadow throughout life, sometimes overpowers him. Even people of great wisdom, who have led a life of austerity and discipline, who have had the awareness of divinity, often become victims of *avidya*. Once we take birth in this physical body we are subject to the laws of nature. We cannot get away from it. The body and its karma, the mind and its karma, existence and its karma, surround us always and everywhere.

However, that need not discourage us. For brave people, life is an adventure, and every adventure is a novelty. Every day we do the same things. For three hundred and sixty five days of the year, we eat in the same kitchen, go to the same toilet, use the same bath, and we have to repeat all that for eighty years, if we even live that long. So we seek to escape

into the sensualities of life. All the victims of life's sensualities are those seeking escape from this monotony and boredom.

Now, for you there is something new – an adventure into the unknown. At this point you do not know which way you have to go, and nobody will be able to tell you. A jet plane which flies into the sky can fly in any direction because there is empty space everywhere. In the same way, your personal consciousness which was flying so far into the external space, following the shadow and mirage of objects, is now turning within, even without your knowledge. It is taking an inward flight towards the unknown, and that is the adventure.

In this adventure, many will be enlightened in this very life and many may have to take a few more incarnations. If you are not satisfied with your spiritual life, with your adventure, the mistake is yours. Everybody is born faultless; the human birth which has been ordained to us is not a punishment, it is a chance, an opportunity given to us to progress, to get enlightenment. Therefore, even if you do not feel satisfied with your life and spiritual progress, the mistake lies with your way of thinking, not with the way of progress. Dissatisfaction is a quality of the mind. If it is in your nature, you will always remain dissatisfied, no matter how much spiritual progress you may make.

Do you think it is a simple thing to measure and assess your own spiritual progress? When you evaluate it, what is the yardstick? How do you know you have progressed in spiritual life? Most people evaluate their spiritual progress on the basis of their modern beliefs, which are social and religious. However, no ethics, morality, religion, wealth, position, status, intellect or degrees, not even the Nobel prize, can be the yardstick to evaluate spiritual progress.

Spiritual progress is a constant awareness of inner existence, which definitely lies beyond external, physical, empirical awareness. When you dream at night, you are completely lost to yourself, and the 'I' is not present at that time. It is obliterated, and you can imagine, when you have inner experience, what the position of the external self will be.

So, this day is a birthday for all of you, and now you have to find out who your mother is. Today you are being initiated into karma sannyasa. With karma sannyasa the value of your life, work and existence changes. Your work does not change; your duties do not change; your daily program does not change, but the value of your life and existence does change.

Always remember that you have chosen a purpose for your life. You may not be able to achieve it straight away, because your past experiences have not happened in just a few days' time. But the purpose of your life now should be to grow in mind, body and inner feelings. No matter where you are and what you do, you must practise yoga daily. At the same time, you should not allow your mind to be negatively affected by whatever happens. Now, of course, you are children, but as you grow, you will find that the mind is affected by a lot of things. Every event affects the mind; that is why people become mentally sick. A karma sannyasin must know how to experience happiness under all circumstances. Happiness and joy – this should be your life!

This is a very important day because on this day the supreme consciousness was born in a human body. When supreme consciousness incarnates in the human body, you call it 'Christ consciousness', and today the Christ consciousness is also being born in you. Happy birthday to you!

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

What is my commitment and do I lose my individual will and freedom after taking karma sannyasa? I'm very keen on being initiated by you, but at the same time I am afraid. What should I do?

Karma sannyasa is a philosophy of realizing the greatness of your status in life. A karma sannyasin has to understand the dignity and appropriateness of this status. Whether you are married or unmarried, whether you have one, two or more children, or no children at all, you have to discover the dignity, the greatness of what you are – that is karma sannyasa.

There is no question of submitting or surrendering your own personality. You are you. You have to use your willpower, your ego, with a greater sense of understanding of your fellows, your subordinates at work, your family members at home, your neighbours and friends. You don't have to surrender your free will or your ego, but you must utilize them with greater understanding so that an atmosphere of conflict is not created anywhere.

A guru will never exploit his disciples because there is a relationship of compassion, love and benevolence between guru and disciple, even as a mother loves her child. So how can the child feel that she is exploiting him? A mother is an emblem of love, sacrifice, benevolence, goodness and charity towards her child, and the relationship between guru and disciple is the same.

In India, children have so much respect for the mother that they can disobey their father but not the mother, because of her selfless love, utter sacrifice and unconditional charity. A mother is so selfless with her children that, even if they get into mischief, she keeps quiet. Her unconditional charity has made them totally subordinate to her. I even know of instances where a boy wanted to marry a certain girl but the father did not agree. The son did not worry about that. However, when the mother said no, he at once accepted it.

That has to be the relationship between guru and disciple, because it is not based on material aspects. You may be an ordinary carpenter or a shoemaker, or the country's Prime Minister. For the guru it is all the same because these relationships are external. That inner link between guru and disciple which is formed through initiation works as a transmitting line of spiritual flow, of spiritual awareness and energy.

The only purpose of this relationship is that you become a good conductor. In order to be a good conductor, there has to be a philosophical and spiritual submission of ego and will. It is not external; I am not going to tell you anything, not at all. The submission of will and ego has to be an internal thing which cannot be accomplished by an intel-

lectual process. It is an outcome of devotion and meditation. You don't have to intellectualize in your mind that you love your guru very much and therefore you are submitting your ego and will to him. This will not do.

When your asana is firm and your body is still, when your pranas are flowing smoothly, when external awareness becomes dim and internal awareness becomes intense, and gradually you begin to lose association with yourself and even with the process of meditation, only then have you submitted yourself to your guru and not until then. And this is not required for karma sannyasins.

Most people are religious. They are taught to go to the temples, mosques and churches, to kneel and bow and say, "I'm thine, my Lord, Thy will be done." This is all bogus; it has no meaning. It is a verbal surrender only. Then you go back home and say to your wife, "You are mine, darling." You see, true surrender is not external; it is something internal. Why don't you want it? If it is an external submission of ego, you say it is hypnotism, indoctrination, brainwashing. Well, even if someone washes you, that will be good!

According to my definition, submission of will and ego takes place only when you have transcended yourself, because when you have transcended yourself, you have submitted yourself. At that time you are finished and belong to me totally – one hundred percent, but not until then. This is the philosophy which you will have to understand.

What should I do if, at a later date, after initiation, I no longer want to be a karma sannyasin?

Karma sannyasa is not the acceptance of a religion. It is not submission to a cult. It represents a natural evolution in the realm of your philosophy. You have decided to follow this process of philosophy. If you don't like your wife or husband, job, home or religion, you know what to do, because all these are the material things of life. They are superimposed on you and you can definitely renounce them at will. If you like, you can even renounce the guru cloth because that is also

external. But how can you renounce the philosophy which you have chosen for the betterment of your happiness?

You haven't chosen karma sannyasa for escape. If you had chosen it as an escape, then naturally you could renounce it. But you have realized that karma sannyasa is a better way of relating to yourself, your job, money, wealth and property; with your children, and with the whole process of emotional, mental and psychological life. That is how you discovered karma sannyasa, as a basic philosophy which blossomed forth from within you.

If you want to renounce karma sannyasa, what do you have to do? If you think that your geru cloth is karma sannyasa, you can throw it away and wear ordinary cloth. If your spiritual name indicates and denotes karma sannyasa, you can also give it up and choose another name. But how can you withdraw from the way of thinking, the internal process, the reason why you became a karma sannyasin? You can transcend karma sannyasa, but you can't withdraw from it. You may say, "I'm not a karma sannyasin from today," you may even publish it in a paper: "I, Swami So-and-so, hereby declare that henceforth, I shall not be known as a karma sannyasin. I shall be known by a different name from today." That much you can do. If you want to give up karma sannyasa, you can put a notice in the newspaper and let everyone know. But once you have planted within your spirit that seed of nobility of relationship, a better understanding of life and a greater acceptance of all that happens and shall happen, I don't think that you can ever renounce it.

The Three Keys

The day you take initiation into karma sannyasa is a very wonderful day. For on that day, you plant a tiny but powerful seed in your consciousness, and this seed will definitely grow into a huge tree, enlightening your inner and outer life. Everybody is connected in some way or another with life, events, persons, happenings and places. Therefore, these things which you come across in life must become tools of inner servicing. What you see and experience now is that everything in your day to day life seems to be obstructing the whole spiritual process. Happiness, unhappiness, depression, mental problems, dissatisfaction, undesirable people and happenings seem to become obstacles to your inner progress, your inner life. But when you become a karma sannyasin, nothing in life remains or becomes an obstacle.

This is the first principle – every experience becomes a tool to shape your spiritual life, and this is the first law of karma sannyasa. You think, “This is worldly; that is spiritual,” but these departments have to be demolished. For a sannyasin, everything is conducive to spiritual life. If meditation is conducive to spiritual awareness, then an unhappy or undesirable event must also be considered conducive to spiritual life, because it is hitting your consciousness. A pleasant situation affects you less than an unpleasant situation. You never forget a strong kick. If someone hates you, you can’t forget it, but if someone loves you, it affects you less.

You have not realized that many things have a better effect on your life because they awaken the consciousness. For example, if you are lying down by the side of the road and a horse passes by, you just look at it, but if a snake passes, you will jump up because it awakens your consciousness. The other side of life, which you are not used to and which you don't like, is a part and parcel of your spiritual life. Do not try to avoid it.

Whenever you become unhappy or critical, whenever you suffer from an illness, or somebody abuses and insults you, you must see how your consciousness is being awakened and how you can use this awakened consciousness to take a jump into meditation. Therefore, the first law of karma sannyasa is: every experience is conducive to spiritual progress. As such, you do not have to create two compartments, the worldly and the spiritual. To ignore the worldly and accept the spiritual is not the law of karma sannyasa.

The whole process of life which you are undergoing is both internal and external; internal meaning the mental, emotional and psychic aspects; external meaning the physical, social and economic aspects. Each and every thing should be considered as a part of the whole process of evolution. If you look into your past life, you will find that the aspirations of your spiritual life which you are exhibiting today are the sum total of what you have gone through. It is a culmination of events; it has not just come up from anywhere.

You are inspired to take karma sannyasa and discover spiritual life. This aspiration hasn't just dropped from heaven; it is a culmination of the whole process of twenty, thirty, forty years of your life, all that has been both desirable and undesirable. It is an outcome of that totality. So how can a karma sannyasin think that this is a coincidence? It is not. It is spiritual life. You should maintain this law throughout: law number one.

Now, law number two pertains to sadhana or spiritual practice. Everybody has some sort of sadhana, such as asana, pranayama, hatha yoga, raja yoga, bhakti yoga, etc. This

is all right to start with, but it is very difficult to maintain regularity of spiritual practice for at least a few years. To take up yoga, to start practising sadhana, is not difficult, but to continue is difficult. In that lies the secret of your success.

Therefore, the second law in the life of a karma sannyasin regarding spiritual practice is not the quantum of practice, but the regularity. Even if you are not able to do much, practise one thing daily, at a fixed time, either in the morning or at night, if only for ten minutes, but do it at any cost!

You may not be well mentally, you may have a lot of preoccupations, you may not be interested in it at all, or even have faith in it, but still you must do it. You will have to do that sadhana. This should not be difficult. It can be done at any time, in any place; you can even do it on the train or plane. The easiest way is through mantra. For the practice of mantra, no concentration is necessary. If you have decided on ten minutes, then just practise for ten minutes.

When I got a mantra from my guru, he told me one thing, "Practise five malas every day, without fail!" Even now I practise it. There was a time, even after initiation, when I changed my philosophy completely and became an atheist. I did not believe in God, but I continued my practice, not because I believed in it, but because I had to do it regularly.

So, the second law in the path of karma sannyasa is: regularity of one practice. Maintain that regularity for a year or two or three. By that time, when the regularity has been established, you can safely start some other sadhana like kriya yoga. To establish regularity takes some time, not just six months. It can easily take two or three years, after which you can say, "Yes, regularity has been established, now I can go ahead with my three hours of sadhana." That is the second law.

The third law is philosophical detachment. I am not using the proper word, *vairagya*, because it has no English equivalent. A lotus leaf never becomes wet although immersed in water. Have you ever seen one? The lotus leaf remains absolutely dry, and the most wonderful thing is that the

lotus is born in water, lives in water and survives by water, not without it. A karma sannyasin is born into the world and survives by the world, because without the world there is no karma sannyasa. But at the same time, you are not 'of' it. Nothing should injure your mind. Things come and go, but you should just observe them. Things keep coming; they are touching you, but you remain above them all.

That practice takes time to develop; it is not so easy that you can start doing it from today. I have called it philosophical detachment, but it is not actually detachment. It is not just saying, "No, I am not related to you; I am not attached to you." You are related to everybody – father, mother, sister, brother and cousin. But there are things which damage the mind and they completely destroy the mental structure from time to time. Every karma sannyasin has to be very careful because you can't proceed inside with a damaged mind.

So, take care of your mind, and when you are practising yoga at home and doing your sadhana, wear your geru robe and use your mala. If you have a job where civil dress is not required, wear the robe all the time, as we wear it, because geru colour is not just a colour. People who practise spiritual life, kundalini yoga, japa yoga, mantra yoga, or kriya yoga generate more energy within themselves, and that energy has to be balanced. The balancing takes place through this geru cloth and the mala which I give at the time of initiation. It is not a religious thing I am giving you.

For example, suppose the electricity is two hundred and forty volts. If you go to the electricity pole and loosen the earth wire, the voltage will immediately drop. That is called adjusting the energy level. Similarly, you have different levels of energy within the body, and through yoga practice the energy grows increasingly stronger. That energy then manifests itself in the form of psychic vision or inner sound, or in the form of depression or sexual mania; it can express itself in many ways. Therefore, you must balance these energies within yourself. For balancing this energy, sannyasins and karma sannyasins use this geru cloth and a mala.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

I am married with a family. Can I take karma sannyasa and what are the obligations?

Family life is a stepping stone towards spiritual life. Let's say there are thirty boys in a class. Some are industrious and they get first-class marks. Some are average and they get second-class marks. Some are hopeless, either they don't study, or they want to study but they don't understand and so they fail. In the same way, there are householders who are conscientious and sincere. They understand that this stage in life is a stepping stone towards spiritual enlightenment, and that they should make use of this opportunity to the maximum, but they don't know the way. They want to use the life of a householder as a path to spiritual evolution, but they don't know what to do. It is these people who can be initiated into karma sannyasa.

Karma sannyasa means renunciation of the consequences of karma. Renunciation of the consequences of karma or detachment from the egotistical involvement with the affairs of life. It does not mean that one has to renounce karma; it does not mean that one has to renounce one's associations with life. One can have children, wife, husband, family. A certain element of attachment is necessary to keep family members, job, profession and so on linked together. It is necessary, but there are certain elements of internal, deep-rooted, neurotic attachment in our nature, without which we can definitely get on with our life very well. I am talking of the unnecessary involvement of ego with day to day events and occurrences. But that awareness comes only with practice.

What are those affairs of life with which you have to maintain a link of attachment, and what are those affairs and attitudes of life from which you have to detach yourself? This is the sadhana of a karma sannyasin. It is not that easy to understand this, because we have been hearing, "Work without attachment. Live with detachment." But this is a very incomplete expression. If I ask you to live with detachment,

what does it mean? How far should you be committed and where do you have to disassociate yourself? That dividing line has to be known by a karma sannyasin.

Initiation into karma sannyasa does not prohibit you at all from anything that is related to life, whether it be family obligations, marriage, progeny, work, wealth, property, accomplishments, ambitions, passions, happiness, unhappiness, tragedy, right behaviour, wrong behaviour, positive habits or even negative habits. All that goes side by side with life. But there is an area of consciousness where your actions produce an effect. An effect is produced with everything you think, do or create, and with everything that happens to you. It is that effect which again rebounds and gives you joy and sorrow. The karma sannyasin learns how he can make himself free from the impulses and effects of karma.

What should I do if my friends and family start criticizing me for taking karma sannyasa?

If somebody starts criticizing, hurting or disturbing you, you don't have to defend yourself; you have to equip yourself. You have to equip yourself with a greater form of awareness that makes you brave and bold, and gives a meaning, an understanding, to every experience in your life. Otherwise, what happens? Worldly people are affected by even the slightest disturbance. They pass along the road and someone looks at them, so they are disturbed and remain disturbed the whole day and night, depending on their principles or degree of bravery. The karma sannyasin has to deal with his own self, problems and environment, his past, present and future by developing an awareness which is more or less untainted and unaffected, like a lotus leaf on water.

I lead a very active life. How will initiation into karma sannyasa affect this?

With initiation into karma sannyasa, you are entering into a wider and more dynamic phase of life. The expression of life will now have to be more dynamic, and each and every

action and thought more potential and powerful. There is not the slightest change in the area of your operation, action, relationships, events, personalities – not the slightest change! The change has to be internal and related to the effects of your life. Life leaves some residue behind in the mind, the totality of life with all its effects, and it is these effects which you have to work out within yourself.

As a karma sannyasin, you have to commit yourself more and more to action and accomplishment. The more you work, the better a karma sannyasin you will be, but you have to keep yourself untouched. Try to keep yourself unaffected and untainted by the effects of karma. Your attachments to people, your duties, commitments and interactions are sometimes pleasant, sometimes not. They create some sort of disturbance in the mind or they leave a disturbance that you alone have to solve as a karma sannyasin. As a worker, farmer, businessman, trader, housewife, head of a family or whatever you may be, there are no changes. It is perfectly all right to continue your active life.

The Inner Veil

Initiation into karma sannyasa is just the beginning of your journey. Although most of you are practising yoga and leading a spiritual life, something more has to be added to your yoga practice and philosophy. The inner life which is beyond intellect and mind, and about which we know practically nothing, has to evolve. Therefore, initiation into karma sannyasa relates to that area of your existence.

The external mind, intellect, buddhi, memory, understanding, analytical mind can be impressed and influenced by word of mouth, by books, religion or spiritual admonitions. But there is an area of your personality which remains unaffected, which nothing can penetrate. Each and every experience which you undergo in life is thoroughly processed, reduced to a seed state and transferred to that area of your personality, just like a tree bears flowers, fruit and seed, and that seed is transferred to the soil.

The internal area of your personality is well protected. It is surrounded by three sheaths or layers. The first layer is the physical body, physical existence or awareness. The second layer is the pranic field or pranic awareness. The third layer is the mind or mental awareness. These are the three sheaths by which your inner self is protected, and it is that inner area of your personality which has to be influenced, which has to grow. Karma sannyasa relates to that inner personality.

You may become a very good person. You may give up your unhealthy, irreligious or even immoral habits. You may even develop a charitable, compassionate nature. However, that makes no difference to your inner awareness. Just by becoming religious, you do not affect any change in that part of your inner life or personality. Goodness, charity and compassion are noble qualities, but they are confined to the world or society to which you are related day in and day out. Even if these qualities of nobility and goodness do not inspire your inner being, you still have to be like that because you live in a world where you are related to a vast society.

I became aware of spiritual life at the age of six. The most difficult obstacle that I discovered then, and have known during the last fifty five years, is that there is a thick wall between the mind and spirit. Beyond that wall is illumination, enlightenment, total awareness, eternity, infinity, immortality! You are just next to that experience, yet you are not able to have it.

You know exactly what the spiritual experience should be from books, the tradition, your own intuition, your gurus, sages and saints. You know that it has to be something like that and yet you are not able to handle it. The most important thing which you have to remember is that knowledge is never just personal information. Experience is also necessary. Experience means becoming that particular thing. In knowledge there is duality – the knower and the object of knowledge. You are the knower and there is the object or process of knowledge; this is duality.

Jnana means knowledge, a fund of information about God, samadhi, kaivalya, shoonya. There is duality. But in experience there is no duality; experiencer and experience become identical, just as if you take a bit of salt and dissolve it in water, the water becomes salty and the salt becomes watery. Their duality is completely lost because the nature and quality of each property becomes mixed. It is not like oil and water, which you cannot mix together, where duality will always remain. You can mix oil with water and shake it

or do anything you like; they will always remain separate because their nature is not identical, whereas the nature of experience and experiencer is identical. Because of this identical nature, they become one and the same.

This big curtain or wall which is hanging between the experience and experiencer has to be removed. It is an iron curtain that has to be destroyed. Right from the beginning, people of every race, in every age, have been trying to find tools for the destruction of this curtain, and they have discovered all sorts of methods, down to LSD, marijuana and heroin. They have come to this point, and you may not know, of course, but people have used such methods that sometimes horrify us – sitting on a dead body and practising meditation and pranayama all night in the burial ground, drinking bottles of alcohol and sleeping with a woman, and practising shambhavi mudra for hours on end. They have tried all kinds of things! Some have succeeded, of course, but most have failed. Most have been destroyed. They couldn't get through the wall dividing the experience from the experiencer.

Some of the devices they used were very good. In India, generally speaking, and particularly with the Hindus, everything in life can be used as a device or tool for spiritual evolution. We use many devices regularly, whether for worshipping Christ, Krishna or guru, for mantra initiation, or even for karma sannyasa. But they are all just devices, and devices are just a means; they are not an end in themselves. That's what I want to make clear to you. It is the inner change which is necessary.

Why should you take karma sannyasa? If you can meditate, if you can withdraw your mind, why should you put on this robe? Why should you take karma sannyasa? It is logical to ask this question, but some things are far beyond human logic, and this has always been the case in every race and age. Karma sannyasa may not be able to fulfil the logistic propositions of the human mind, but nevertheless the impressions of karma sannyasa will go deep down and will

help you in the destruction of that impenetrable wall. Once that impenetrable wall is destroyed, you have nothing to do because the process of experience, or rather experiencing the experience is not a matter of effort. It is just a realization.

Suppose I go mad and forget myself. My name is Swami Satyananda but I forget myself and say I am someone else, Mr This or Mr That. Now how are you going to bring me back to the knowledge of who I am? Once my mind is treated properly and I have regained my awareness, I will know that I was and am Swami Satyananda. Exactly this process of discovering the reality of your consciousness has to take place, and for that, the most innocent and faultless method is karma sannyasa. With this you will continue your practice of mantra and whatever form of yoga you are currently practising.

I wish to tell you here that, by accepting the role of a karma sannyasin, you are coming closer to fulfilling your responsibilities. Your family and society responsibilities continue to play an important part in your life. Detachment need not be practised. There's no such thing as detachment because most of us do not understand what it means. In yoga we call it vairagya, freedom from the effect of past and present events which you have known, seen, heard and experienced, that is detachment.

When detachment is developed in defence, it is not a positive quality. On the contrary, in this case attachment is better than detachment because it has all the tenderness, all the humility, all that we call understanding. You have to interact with your society, family and friends in a very tender and humble way. Do not tell people that from today you are a karma sannyasin and no longer have any attachment to them. They will laugh at you and say, "What is he talking about – detachment!"

Karma sannyasins have to be more involved with the processes of life and thereby they have to grow in and through the world. If you are married, take better care of your children and be more particular about the health, education

and lifestyle of your family. If you have a job or a shop, work harder than you did before. If you have been sleeping more, now you should sleep less. If you have been eating carelessly, now you should eat carefully, and if you have been having a lot of problems and difficulties in your family, try to reduce them as far as you can. If you have been suffering from dissatisfaction and frustration in your family life, business life, or anywhere, try to reduce those frustrations. Wherever you go, whatever you come across, whomsoever you meet and however you live, try to gain maximum happiness and satisfaction.

You have to practise this unity with everybody and everything around you. If you want to practise union with the whole world, first try it at home with your own people. Make them happy and let them make you happy. Help them and let them help you. Understand them and let them understand you. That's called union; that's called communion and then, when the inner veil shatters, you will have the higher experience!

Ancient Tradition of Rishis

If the doors of paradise were open only for the holy, then I think it would be God's greatest disappointment. He would have to wait and wait. There would be very few entries into paradise because man's evolution is incomplete and he is suffering from infirmity of willpower. He is not perfect. If the doors of hell were open for every sinner there would surely be a population problem. This is not a joke! It is a very serious matter which has always been on my mind. I have never believed in sin and I do not believe that man is a sinner. We meet obstacles; we falter and we fall – that is all! Every time we fall, we make a fresh attempt to evolve.

It is very important for everybody to know that spiritual light is for everyone, and it is also very important for everybody to understand that samadhi and spiritual evolution can be had by all. This is the purpose for which we are born into this world. I cannot see any other reason for my incarnation. I cannot believe that I have come in this physical body with any other purpose.

Often we become self-complacent and do not want to improve the quality of our existence. In fact, often when we follow a particular religious path, we become very careless. A Hindu who follows Hindu rituals becomes complacent. The same thing applies to everybody. We think that with the acceptance of a religion, the objective is immediately attained. However, membership of a religious institution is not the

ultimate purpose of life. We have to understand the whole affair in the context of our day to day life. Why are we born; why do we grow up; why do get married; why do we procreate and so on?

In India there was a very ancient tradition which was followed by the saints and sages who lived with their wives and families, deep in the forests and jungles, practising sadhana and meditation. This system was known as the tradition of rishis. The tradition of rishis is meant to give a reorientation to the lifestyle of every householder because often householders forget the purpose of life. It is not wrong to enjoy life, to have desires and to fulfil them. It is not wrong to display passions. But when we forget the purpose and destination of life, nothing that we do has any meaning. It was for this reason that the tradition of rishis was organized thousands of years ago. The tradition of rishis is the tantric tradition of sannyasa.

Now the concept of sannyasa needs redefinition. For most people, a sannyasin is equated with a monk or nun, but this is not correct because this type of sannyasa does not in any way help the evolution of society. Sannyasa is not and should not be considered as an exclusive way of life. A sannyasin living in seclusion, hating life, detesting everything, is more or less living the life of an idiot. There is no dynamism in his personality, no philosophy or system for balancing the passions. There is no flexibility to adjust to the frivolities of life. How then can we say that such a life is complete?

So there are two extreme ways of life, one is the life of a careless householder, another is the life of a monk or sannyasin. One is a rightist and the other is a leftist, there is no middle path. That is why most of the householders today are living a life of guilt and repentance. They are not proud of their own existence, while sannyasins have become too proud. On the one side, you have the arrogance of the sannyasin, and on the other the guilt and repentance of the householder. This is not how one can develop spiritual awareness. Therefore, what man requires is another concept

of sannyasa, not according to the orthodox style, but according to the tantric style.

In tantra, Shiva and Shakti live together. Shiva represents chitta or consciousness while Shakti represents prana or energy. In this physical body, you have ida and pingala, chitta and prana. You cannot survive with only one aspect. There has to be an integration and correlation of two forces in one body. It is exactly the same in ordinary life; men and women represent these two poles of energy. The quality of energy which man and woman embody is different. They may look alike; they may belong to one family and their physical structure may be more or less the same, but the quality of energy is not the same. Just as ida and pingala function together in the body, in family life husband and wife, Shiva and Shakti, live together.

This is the tantric concept of sannyasa. So there is no question about whether a man can live with a woman and still be a sannyasin. I do not think that by renouncing a man or a woman you can become a true sannyasin. Deep in the mind the need is there and it cannot be rooted out. Therefore, the tantric concept of sannyasa has to be understood by each and every person. Those who are serious about awakening their higher spirit should relate their station as a householder in life with this. It is important not only for the enlightenment of the individual but also for an enlightened world. How are you going to raise the standard by yourself? You have lived the life of careless householders throughout and you want your children to be careful – it's not possible!

Through your philosophy you can influence the genes. If you are a careless householder, you have a certain quality of genes and you can only produce that type of child. Unless you are a deep thinker, the idea of sannyasa will not dawn in your mind. The moment the idea of sannyasa dawns, the genes begin to change and these genes are responsible for the quality of the child. If there was a race of tantric sannyasins, the level of consciousness of the entire population would rise, which is quite important in my opinion.

In ancient India, there were many such sannyasins who were married and had children. They were the guides of society and very highly enlightened people. They had great mental and spiritual powers and contributed a lot towards making life harmonious. Therefore, it is necessary for people today to think along these lines. I thought about it quite a few years ago and then I started this international yoga movement. In the beginning, society's orthodox section was very critical. They thought that by initiating householders who 'sin' every night, I was polluting sannyasa. I told them that by giving sannyasa to householders, I was not polluting sannyasa but purifying the life of the householders.

The idea of sannyasa dawns only in the mind of a very enlightened person. When you have become aware that the objective of your life is inner enlightenment, then there is only one way for you to act – you should immediately transform the meaning of your existence. Now, throughout the world, there are thousands and thousands of householders living the life of modern rishis, along with their wives and children. In everyday life, they mingle with streams of people and at the same time they waft all around them the fragrance of spiritual ideas to remind themselves and others of the true purpose of life.

The most important thing for a sannyasin living in the world is meditation. He will have to raise his consciousness from a gross to a higher level. For example, when you enjoy chocolate, the experience is gross; whenever you get a pain in the body, the experience is gross. In this way, our pleasures and pains are experienced through our gross centres. Our senses are so extroverted that the mind is not able to experience things directly without an object.

If you want to enjoy a flower, you must see it first. If you want to enjoy music, you must hear it first. If you want to enjoy a beautiful fragrance, you must smell it. If you want to experience tenderness, you must touch the body. Can you experience these things inside without the experience of the senses? Can you hear music with the ears closed? Can you

see the glory of nature – flowers, trees, oceans, rivers, lakes, mountains, plains, the sun, moon and stars, without eyes? Can you experience any pleasure, any pain, any sensation, without the middle man? You know who the middle man is? The senses – karmendriyas and jnanendriyas – the five senses of action and the five senses of knowledge are essential. Without them you cannot experience life. This is an ordinary limitation, but the person who is able to raise his level of consciousness above these senses can experience everything directly. Therefore, meditation is the life and breath of the modern sannyasin.

Meditation or dhyana yoga is a state in which you experience your mind directly and this mind is so important for everybody. For most, the mind is a mystery; it is a demon. Many people have compared it with a monkey, but I don't think the mind is a monkey. The mind is the reservoir of great power and we know only a little bit of this mind. When you are angry, when you are unhappy, when you are sorry, then you become aware of your mind. You think, "Oh, my mind is very unhappy today," or "My mind is depressed." But that is not the mind. You have to realize the totality of mind in the practice of meditation. In order to realize the mind, you will have to decrease the frequency, the speed of fluctuation. This is not easy to achieve, but it is possible. If you can completely remove thoughts and ideas, you can see the mind.

Therefore, to realize the reservoir of the mind you will have to eliminate three things, step by step. The first is thought, or fluctuation; the second is inner visions, and the third is sleep or hypnosis. Then your awareness will be complete and thorough. As you proceed in meditation, awareness does not diminish, and when you have completely succeeded in meditation, there is total awareness without thought, vision or hypnosis. Therefore, the system you have to employ for meditation has to be perfect.

In the last few years, many young people have taken to using psychedelic drugs. Somehow a misunderstanding has

entered their minds; they think that to see something inside is real meditation. They read in the Bible and other books that a saint saw this, that and the other thing, and they believe that the experience produced with these drugs is of the same quality.

In actual fact, such experiences should also be eliminated. A psychedelic experience is the product of a chemical interaction in the body. It is not caused by eliminating thought; it is not caused by changing the frequencies of the mind. Whatever psychedelic drugs one may take, or whatever experiences come from them, these are not at all related to dhyana yoga or meditation.

In olden days, a special herbal drink was used in India. It was not champagne, of course; it was known as soma. People using that drink used to feel very 'high' and they would have all sorts of experiences. They used to see gods and goddesses in heaven and on earth. But the wise men finally banned it because they thought that, although it could change the behaviour of the mind, it could not transform it.

In the practice of dhyana yoga, first of all you have to decrease the frequency of the mind waves which are responsible for brain waves. In order to do this, you have first to withdraw the senses. When the brain is isolated and the senses cannot feed it with the necessary sensorial impulses, the frequencies decrease.

Isolation of the brain and mind can be brought about in many ways. One of the most important methods is mantra. There are different ways of practising for different types of people. The sound of the mantra has a deep impact on the behaviour of the brain and mind. The brain waves react to this sound stimuli. For example, if you practise mantra at a medium speed, the brain waves adjust themselves accordingly, and if you go on decreasing the speed of the mantra, the brain waves gradually begin to subside.

Now, decreasing the frequencies of the mind is a process which should not be done all at once. It should take time because when the mind undergoes a change in the rate of

frequencies, many corresponding changes take place in the body. There is a change in the body temperature, in the oxygen consumption, in the galvanic skin resistance, quality and quantity of hydrochloric acid and enzyme secretion. Also, many of the changes take place in the physical body suddenly. Therefore, in order to give the body time to adapt, you must allow ample time for the process of decreasing the frequencies of the mind.

If, for example, your mantra is ‘Om Namaha Shivaya’, you should practise it in a particular rhythm. You can fix the mantra at the eyebrow centre or heart centre, and then you must fix the timing. The speed of repetition should remain the same throughout, but there will be a little modification from time to time. For example, in the first step you say, ‘Om-Na-ma-ha-Shiv-aya’ and in the second step, after one month, ‘O-m-Na-ma-ha-Sh-iv-a-ya’, slower. The mantras and the timing may also be set the same throughout, but then the sound gradually covers many more mantras at one time. Or maybe, after one year, or one and a half years, you can say, ‘Ommm-Naaa-maaa-haaa-Shi-iv-aa-yaa’, very slowly.

Now, sound has many frequencies. At one frequency you can hear many sounds and at another frequency you cannot hear so clearly. At one frequency you can only feel the sound, you cannot hear it, and when a sound is produced at the highest possible frequency, it is called thought. Therefore, in the practice of mantra, you produce a sound at such a frequency that you can think it in the mind.

According to the science of mantra, a sound has four frequencies. The first is audible, the second felt, the third becomes a thought wave, and when the fourth frequency is produced, the thinker is no more. That is the aim of mantra meditation. In the books on mantra yoga, these four frequencies have names. The first is called *vaikhari*, the second, *madhyama*, the third *pashyanti*, and the fourth, *para*. These are the technical terms for the four frequencies of mantra. Not only ‘Om Namaha Shivaya’, but any mantra can be adjusted to a particular rhythm on the mental plane.

The practice of mantra will completely remove the intermediary of the senses which lie between you and the mind. Then you must have something to fix your mind upon. This should be a definite object or form. You can concentrate your mind on an idea or on a vibration, but it is better to use a fixed form. When you are trying to focus your mind on a particular form, you must see that nothing else but that particular object is in your mind. If other thoughts or visions come, you must remove them. If you are concentrating on a blue lotus, you must reject every other experience except that blue lotus. You should not let your mind drift from your symbol to something else, to something else and then something else.

Often people experience different things in meditation and become very happy saying, “I saw this and I saw that.” However this is not an achievement; it indicates that the mind has drifted; it has gone out of alignment. During meditation it is very difficult to stick to one form, I know, but if you can make your attention constant, your mind steady, without any waves, then the awareness will remain consistently on the blue lotus, the blue lotus and the blue lotus.

Awareness is like the flow of electrons or water; it breaks every now and then. So, there is awareness of the blue lotus, then a break of awareness; awareness of the blue lotus and again a break. In yoga these breaks of consciousness are known as *vikshepa* or *vikalpa*. They should be avoided. When you are concentrating on a form and your consciousness becomes constant without a break, it is called dhyana. When the awareness of the form is beginningless, endless, and does not break at any point, then it is called dhyana. Dhyana, therefore means constant, total awareness.

In Sanskrit, the word *rishi* means ‘a seer’, one who can see. A rishi is not a holy man, a clergyman, a priest or monk. How is he a seer? He can see without eyes; he can hear without ears; he can walk without feet. Such a person is called a rishi or seer. Therefore, a tantric sannyasin should practise meditation and aspire to become a rishi.

Now, regarding tantric sannyasa, there is one more question which must be clarified – “How to adjust your sexual behaviour?” Many people have answered this question according to their own idea and image. Is the sexual relationship with your wife or husband spiritual or anti-spiritual? According to the tantric heritage, it is spiritual. This means that you can progress spiritually while you improve upon your sexual interaction with your partner. In tantra, it is said that there are three purposes for sexual interaction, and these have been stated clearly. The first is progeny (the tamasic purpose), the second, pleasure (the rajasic purpose) and the third, spiritual transformation (the sattwic purpose).

A sensualist interacts for pleasure and an ordinary person for progeny, but a tantric sannyasin interacts for the purpose of samadhi. This is because the sexual act is intrinsically connected with the awakening of the evolutionary power and has a lot to do with the awakening of the higher centres responsible for the deeper and more profound experiences. This is an important science and you have to know more about it so that you can apply it in your daily life.

There are certain yoga postures and hatha yoga kriyas through which you can redirect your energy. If you can handle that experience through the help of a proper teacher, then your life as a householder, the interaction with your partner will become a spiritual ritual. I am not a promoter of the sexual sciences, but I do not want to close my eyes to the reality, and I do not want you to close your eyes either.

There is a reality to which you are exposed. If that reality is going to send you to hell, then that will be a great tragedy. Sexual and spiritual communication are not different. Sexual life is not anti-spiritual. If properly conducted by the wise and disciplined, it can be a springboard to higher realms. You can transcend sex by living into it, by living through it.

Nature has created a system and you must respect it; you must accept it. But that does not prohibit you from becoming a sannyasin with respect for yourself, with faith in what you

are doing for your spiritual progress, and with hope eternal for spiritual illumination. If both you and your partner sit together in meditation, you can create an energy which will help each of you to evolve. Just imagine what kind of children you will have! I am proud that my own parents were able to live like that. After completing your obligations, having profound spiritual experiences, you will be able to enter into full sannyasa.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Could you please talk about the desire for enlightenment and the desire for a marriage relationship. I cannot understand how to work for the fulfilment of both and yet surely both are necessary for the furtherance of the human race.

Marital life and spiritual life are not two separate paths. Marriage is not an obstacle on the spiritual path. Men and women come together either for progeny or for pleasure. But if you want to achieve enlightenment, you will have to change the purpose of your interaction. If you understand properly, and if you can define the interaction between a man and woman, then you will realize that the sexual relationship creates an experience which will enable you to understand what the final experience is.

In western countries, most people think that marital life is an obstacle to spiritual progress, and that if you want to be enlightened, then you have to drop it. This philosophy of the West has also affected some of the more educated Indians, but it is not correct. Marital life is not a sin. There is nothing bad in it. How can you think that marital life is a sin? Because you have been told time and time again that a certain type of relationship between a man and a woman is a sin, and that is in your mind.

You should try to get that idea out of your mind, otherwise your family life will be disrupted as you go into spiritual life because you won't be able to reconcile the guilt. "Oh, I sleep with my wife," or "I sleep with my husband," "I'm committing

sin; how can I have enlightenment?" You must get it out of your mind. In order to get rid of this complex, this feeling of guilt, shame and inferiority, you have to work very hard. You have to explode the very basis of your philosophy.

If a man's relationship with his wife is a sin, who has created it? The one who has created this relationship is a sinner. Nature is the sinner, if she has created it, because he is bound by the laws of nature, which have caused that urge in her as well as in him. If he interacts with his wife, it is because he is bound by the laws of nature. If nature has created that urge in them, she is the first sinner and they are sinners number two, and if God has created that urge, then he is sinner number one, nature is sinner number two and they are the last of them all. No! This is a very erroneous way of thinking, and if you think this way, don't marry; stay single all your life.

As married couples, how can we utilize the sexual experience for a higher purpose?

Most people only practise sexual interaction for pleasure. It is all right to do this for some time, but you must transcend this motive, because if you continue to have this motive all the time, you can never attain bliss and you will remain dissatisfied. Then you will have to find out how a sexual relationship can produce a higher experience, and this is actually another science.

The act itself is not final. There are kriyas and other practices which you must learn. You must adjust your diet and daily routine. It is possible for married people to develop higher awareness, but they have to realize the purpose and responsibility of married life and, for this, the entire social structure must be revolutionized. Those people who are very sincere about spiritual life should learn these practices, and they must also learn hatha yoga very systematically. It takes years, not just a few months. They must devotedly practise and master pranayama; just a few exercises, that's all, and nothing more than that.

In hatha yoga, there are six kriyas (shatkarmas) for your purification, and other kriyas such as uddiyana bandha and so on. Then there are pranayamas where you retain the breath with bandhas, where you lock particular centres in the body. After these practices you should go on to practise kriya yoga. When you are practising kriya yoga or hatha yoga, then your marital life will give you another quality of experience. The experience which most people have on a gross plane, you can have on a higher plane, and the experience which you normally have for only a few seconds, you can have for hours together.

It is the centre of experience which is important. Most people have experience in the lower centres, but the experience must be felt in ajna chakra, sahasrara chakra or *bhrumadhya* (eyebrow centre), and that experience must give birth to another experience immediately. However, that does not happen with most people. I think we just crave for a short duration of experience and once that experience dies, we are depressed. That is why so many divorces are taking place, because one type of experience with one person is so monotonous.

You will not find this with Indians because the experience which they get is something else. Once there is awakening of an experience, there has to be other experiences, like visions. How many of you who are married can immediately withdraw after orgasm and begin to see mountains, gardens, flowers, trees, Krishna and guru? No, you can't do it. After orgasm you are dead tired. So you can understand the low quality of sexual life you are leading. It is just the repetition of animal reflexes, which is why your families are broken into two.

After eighteen years of marriage, you are separated; isn't that funny? Is your wife a prostitute? What kind of culture do you have? You should try to live with one woman or one man, but you don't get pleasure from that. So, how can you attain that pleasure which is enduring and everlasting? You must first look upon the woman as Shakti and the man as Shiva, and if you want to have this concept, there are only

two ways to attain it. Either you should be born a Hindu in India in your next lifetime, or you must practise hatha yoga and kriya yoga.

How much is married life harmful to spiritual growth?

Married life is not harmful to spiritual growth, that is the first point. In married life there are many difficulties which one has to face, and if you take these difficulties positively, they increase the quality of your awareness. If you are not dejected and frustrated, if you have not lost hope, then you will realize that the life of marriage is an ashram or institution where you have come to work out your karma, samskaras, desires and passions, which is very necessary when you go high on the spiritual path.

When the mind dives deep or when the mind soars high and you begin to lose contact with these external realities, at that time the unfulfilled desires and passions, jealousies or what you may call *maya*, all come in the form of interior experiences. These experiences are deluding because you mistake them for higher experiences. You remain entangled in them and don't go further. Therefore, the sages and saints designed the relationship and institution called grihastha ashrama, the life of a householder.

Here you have to face difficulties, become disillusioned and realize the desires you are running after are only *maya* (illusion); that the jealousies, greed, love and passion which you have been chasing for so many years are ideas, fantasies, and not of any spiritual consequence. It is no use telling you these things. How can you realize this unless you suffer it? If everything were pleasant in the life of a householder, then what would you say? "Greed is wonderful; love is wonderful; passion is wonderful; everything is wonderful!" Disillusionment has to come through the path of suffering and disappointment, and that is what the path of a householder provides you with.

Another important point you have to remember is that in the life of a householder two beings come together. They

are known as husband and wife. Physically they may look alike, but they are not the same; they are different stuff. The wife is the negative pole of energy and the husband is the positive pole. A man by himself is incomplete, the same as a woman by herself is incomplete. A negative line of energy does not produce electricity, neither does a positive line. We have to bring them together into a cable, and household life is that cable. You have to bring them together, fix them properly and connect them. Then the generation of experience takes place. So, the life of a householder seems to be a disturbance for spiritual life but it is not.

Intensity of Attachment

When the attachments and attractions which are normally directed outwards to gross and transitory objects of life are redirected inwards, it is called devotion. Devotion is *bhakti* and the opposite of devotion is *bhoga*. *Bhoga* is external attraction which occurs when the mind and senses dwell in sense objects. When you think about them, when you are deeply attached to them, it is called *bhoga*. When the mind and senses are directed inwards, towards the self in the form of your deity, God or guru, it is called *bhakti*. You may even use the expression 'pure love'.

In yogic philosophy, love is of two types. One is divine and the other is earthly and worldly. When your mind dwells on the transitory and fleeting affairs of the world, you are left totally empty at the end, with frustrations and disappointments. Even as a deer runs after the mirage in the desert, ultimately finding its own grave, in the same way, the people of the world follow the path of the senses because they believe that the pleasure, the ecstasy, the delight, is emanating from the objects. Chocolates are sweet, flowers are beautiful, and so on and so forth. We think that the pleasure which we experience emanates from the objects. This is called worldly attachment, worldly love.

The saints say that the pleasure which we think we are deriving from the external objects does not actually emanate from them at all; it comes from your own self. Delight, joy

and pleasure is the nature of the self and not of the sense objects. As such, those who want to experience delight and bliss externally should turn the mind and senses inward and go back to the source. The source is within you, and when you begin to realize this truth, that everything you were experiencing was coming from within and not from without, then you begin to delve deep into your own self.

Now, when you begin to look within your own self, you must have a concept or symbol upon which to focus and steady the mind, and that concept is God, guru or ishta devata. God is formless and nameless, so the next best representative is the *ishta devata* – a divine form which you have chosen for yourself. The concept of ishta devata may be a hypothesis; it doesn't matter. Even the word God, the concept of God, is a hypothesis because you don't know whether what you have understood from the books is correct or not.

The ishta devata which you have chosen is one concept of the inner self. Another concept is the guru. When you draw yourself within, you have to base your consciousness on either one of these two, or even on both, if possible. As you become more and more aware of the ishta devata and the guru, you begin to develop a rapport between yourself and him or her. That unity, that totality of consciousness in which you can experience yourself and him as one is called bhakti or bhakti yoga.

Bhakti is transcendental love. It is something that cannot be explained. It is not the same as the love you feel when you live together with another person. It is total awareness. If you have total awareness of someone in your mind and in yourself, then you are practising bhakti yoga.

There are two important texts on bhakti yoga. One is by Rishi Narada and the other by Rishi Chandilya. In these books it is said that when there is total devotion, self-consciousness is completely lost. When the river mingles with the sea, it loses its name and form and becomes one with the ocean. In the same way, when I love myself, when I love my guru, or when I love the divine form which I have chosen for

myself, I become one with it, so much so that the difference between I and He is lost.

In the Sufi tradition, there were many great saints and bhaktas. Sufi comes from the word 'sofia', which means *vidya* or 'divine knowledge'. There once lived a great Sufi poet whose name was Ghalib. He said, "When I come close to you, for some time I am aware of myself and yourself. Then suddenly I am lost and you alone remain. No, you are lost and I alone remain."

So, whether I am lost and you remain, or you are lost and I remain, it is all the same. The merger or union between the individual consciousness and cosmic consciousness can be explained either way. Universal consciousness completely devours individual consciousness or individual consciousness becomes one with superconsciousness. Of course, this can happen by any other path – raja yoga, karma yoga, jnana yoga, but through bhakti, through intense devotional attachment, you can get there very fast.

In India, during the nineteenth century, there was a great saint called Ramakrishna Paramahansa. His closest disciple was Swami Vivekananda. Ramakrishna was illiterate. He was married when he was only thirteen, so his wife must have been about eight years old. From his youth he was a bhakta and gradually developed absolute devotion to Kali. He had such an intense attachment for Kali that he used to call her Mother. If you have seen a picture of Kali, you will know that there is no one more ugly than she. Her tongue is ferocious and hangs out. Her eyes are bloodshot and her cheeks are very hard and black like soot. Her breasts hang down and she is adorned with a garland of skulls. In one hand she holds a sword and in the other a skull dripping blood. She is a symbol of all that is atrocious and brutal, but this man began to love her.

He became a poojari or priest in the Kali temple at Dakshineswar in Calcutta, and was employed by the builder of that temple who was a *rani* (local princess). While performing devotional rituals for Kali, at certain moments

he would lose himself completely. In India there is a system of worship whereby you light incense sticks, offer flowers, wave lights, ring bells, blow the conch and then offer food to the deity. So, while he used to do this practice called *arati*, instead of waving the lights before Kali, he used to wave them before himself. At the end of the worship, while offering prasad to Kali, he used to eat it himself and worship himself with the flowers.

News was brought to the rani that her priest was misbehaving and had gone crazy. When Ramakrishna was asked about this he replied, "When I am worshipping Kali, for some time I am aware of myself as a priest and that she is a goddess to whom I am offering flowers, incense and sweets, but at a certain moment I completely forget who is the goddess and who is the worshipper." The duality was completely lost, even by this ritual worship through an idol. Finally, through absolute attachment to Kali, Ramakrishna attained the state of non-dual consciousness – oneness of reality.

One day a great swami of the same order to which I belong came to him. His name was Totapuri. He had heard of this crazy man of Calcutta and thought it was necessary for him to give him a bit of higher knowledge, because he was worshipping an idol which was not right, according to Totapuri's tradition. So, in order to initiate Ramakrishna, Totapuri went to meet him at Dakshineshwar. When he arrived, Ramakrishna worshipped him according to Hindu tradition, giving him absolute respect.

When Totapuri said that he wanted to teach him non-dual vedantic meditation, where the reality is unqualified, without name and without form or anything else, Ramakrishna said, "Well, I don't understand all that. You give me the experience, that's enough." Totapuri said, "Okay, sit down in padmasana." Ramakrishna sat down in padmasana and the swami began to teach him about the non-dual form of reality, the God who has no form, who is everywhere. When Ramakrishna said that he was not having any experience, Totapuri got angry. There was a crystal ball near him

and, picking it up, he hit Ramakrishna on the forehead with it. Ramakrishna cried out just one word, “Ma!” and went into a trance.

You see, this is called bhakti. There have been many devotees, many bhaktas throughout the world who have intensified the quality of their attachment and sublimated it. You should not try to sublimate the ordinary, feeble quality of your attachment. You must first intensify your attachment towards the mundane things, then you must transfer that to God, guru or ishta and sublimate it.

In the sixteenth century India, there was a boy who was married to a girl whom he loved. One day, when he came home from the market, he found that the girl was not there; she had left for her parents’ place across the river. He was so enamoured of her that he couldn’t manage to remain alone without her. So he left for his in-laws’ house. By the time he arrived at the river bank, it was late at night and he found that the river was in flood. Seeing a corpse which he thought was a log floating towards him, he caught hold of it and it carried him across the river.

It was midnight when he finally reached the house. According to Hindu custom it is not proper for a son-in-law to enter the house at that time, so he decided to scale the wall and get in through the window. Seeing a snake hanging from the roof and thinking it to be a rope, he grabbed hold of it, climbed up and knocked at his wife’s window. When his wife saw him outside her window, holding onto a snake, she was horrified. After letting him in, she asked him how he had come at that time of night. He replied, “I crossed the river holding onto a log of wood and climbed up to your window holding onto a rope.”

Such was the intensity of his attachment for his wife that he wasn’t even aware of the corpse or the snake at that time. But she told him, “Look here, I admire your intensity of attachment for me and I am pleased by the way you have exhibited it, but I must tell you something. If you were to have the same intensity of attachment for God as you have

for me, you would have been liberated from the trammels of duality, from this ever occurring worldly existence.”

That gave the boy a terrific jolt. It was a type of shock treatment administered by his most beloved wife. You should also get that shock. It occurs when the reality is stated before you. She stated the reality, and the boy left her house immediately and changed his whole direction in life. He became a great poet, singer, saint and reformer of the sixteenth century. His name was Tulsidas, and he wrote the *Ramayana*.

In the *Ramayana*, Tulsidas writes, “May I love God as an extremely passionate man loves a beautiful damsel.” That is called intensity of attachment transferred from the lower to the higher dimension; that is devotion or bhakti.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

How can we sublimate emotional and sensual love into God-realization?

God is inside, God is outside and God is in your bones. In order to find that God, it is necessary to sit down quietly every day within yourself and transform the philosophy of your life. Then you should try to understand and reflect upon the relationship that you have with everybody outside and the relationship between this external body and your inner being.

It is said that by true bhakti you can realize God; you can see God within you. But sometimes bhakti yoga is very difficult because you are devotionally bankrupt. All the emotion, all the devotion, all the love is squandered. You have the objects of the world which are so fanciful. You cry and scream and shout for the things which are so brief in life. Find out whom you love day in and day out, and then discover how much of that love you give to God. Do you love God as much as you love your son or girlfriend? Do you feel for God or do you remember him as you remember your bank balance? I can give you thousands of examples from your life where you have failed to spare even a little love for him.

Our love for him is intellectual. Our love for the things of this world is actual. Why don't you reverse the picture? It's so hard! But if you can do this, then your love for the world becomes intellectual and your love for God actual. Can you love your wife or husband intellectually; can you have intellectual love for children, bank balance, property or poverty? If you could do this, then it would only take the twinkling of an eye to have that God experience. However, no matter how much you talk of God, nothing will happen.

Once a disciple asked his guru, "How can I see God within?" The guru replied, "Why don't you cry out for him?" The next day the disciple went to the sanctum sanctorum and he started crying, "God, I want you, I want you." He went on waiting and watching but nothing happened. The guru said to him, "Good drama, my child!" Then the guru took that disciple on a journey. They travelled by boat. When the boat was halfway across the river, the guru just dashed the disciple into the water and the disciple started screaming and crying and waving his arms about. When he was gasping for breath the guru pulled him out asking, "Have you ever cried like that for God?" Then the disciple understood.

You can cry and gasp only for those you love. But how can you love that formless God whom you have never seen? Nobody knows whether he is black, white, brown or yellow. Therefore, it is better that everybody tries to awaken the self, and this is the prime purpose of our incarnation on this planet. To eat, sleep, seek security and have sensual pleasure is also meant for animals. Man stands out first by this one virtue. The moment he becomes aware, he must think, "How can I see God in myself?" Then he should devote himself to the attainment of that experience.

What is bhakti yoga and how can we develop it?

Bhakti yoga is the highest culmination in life, and if bhakti happens to manifest in you naturally, by itself, even without listening to me or reading the *Bhagavad Gita* or *Ramayana*,

then you have reached the summum bonum of earthly life. You have come to the climax of human evolution.

To develop bhakti is not as easy and as ordinary as most of us believe. In fact, I have found bhakti extremely difficult to practise. It cannot be taught, it has to be inborn. You cannot become an intellectual bhakta, and that is where most of us are failing. Everything in this world can be learned and you can even attain *nirvikalpa samadhi* without much difficulty, but how hard it is to develop even a speck of bhakti! It is an experience that will completely transport you from this plane to that plane of experience within a trice. It doesn't take years or months, but just a few seconds.

How can bhakti be developed? Ramakrishna has said that one has to divert the totality of one's experience, only then will it happen. As you love your wife or husband, your child, mother, wealth and property, or yourself and your life, that total love will have to be directed to words God. Then He will be here and now. For a jnani, God is nowhere, but for a bhakta or devotee, God is everywhere. The concept of bhakti completely transforms every speck of one's existence and then one is no longer a mere man or woman.

Therefore, the culmination of all paths – tantra, raja yoga, karma yoga and even jnana yoga – is bhakti. Just as all the rivers flowing from every part of the Himalayas ultimately reach Indranagar, the totality of man's consciousness, his mystic, occult consciousness, his psyche, subconscious and conscious mind, all meet at one point – bhakti! Once bhakti is realized there is nothing beyond. So, bhakti is the most powerful method to come face to face with, and to realize that formless, nameless, transcendental *paramatma* (supreme soul) in any form.

How does one develop detachment with a weak mind?

In order to succeed in detaching yourself, you must develop a certain type of philosophy. That is the base. You may perform the karma, the act, but you have the feeling that God is the doer and you are just a participator. So you

are not involved. Another way is to think that things are happening because that is their destiny, the will of God, and therefore you can practise a sort of detachment.

Now, there is a third system that is called the practice of self-analysis. In yoga we relate the mind and the desire, the mind and the detachment. Detachment is a quality of the mind; passion is also a quality of the mind. This mind is radiating itself and transmitting these different patterns. Now, what you want to do is withdraw a few of these patterns and project a few.

However, in yoga this is not accepted. According to the quality of your mind, whether you have a weak mind or a strong mind, the radiations have to be balanced. Supposing you are emotionally immature, there is then no use telling you to practise detachment. You have to put everything into attachment. You will have to go headlong, neck deep into attachment, like a mad person. At some point you just get a shock. Then it comes, not full detachment, but just a glimpse of detachment. It is born out of the relationship. It is born out of your own experience. With this the balance starts.

This detachment is minimal at first, its quantity is very little. Your passions may be totally violent and overpowering, but at one point somewhere you just become aware of detachment. However, as you go along freely with attachments, the detachment grows. This is the natural progression. It happens with everybody, particularly with people of the East.

What is maya?

Maya is a quality or state of mind. When the mind is playing with objects, with the material things of life and giving them a value of their own – “This is my mother, this is my father, he is my enemy, he is my friend, he is a bad man, he is a good man, I love, I hate,” – this is how maya has created an impression or an idea in the mind. When the mind behaves in a particular way, it is called maya.

When the mind runs after the transitory objects of the world, it is called maya. Maya is neurosis. There are two dif-

ferent qualities of mind. One is called psychosis and the other is neurosis. When there is nothing there but still, due to maya, we imagine that there is something, that is called avidya or ignorance. There is nothing, but the mind imagines there is something, and that is called psychosis. And when there is something there but the mind imagines that it is something else, it is called neurosis; that is also maya.

Maya has a base for illusion. Avidya has no base for illusion. When there is nothing there but still you can see a ghost, that is psychosis. And when there is something there, say a rope, for example, but you mistake it for a snake, that is called maya. If there is a rope but in the darkness you find it and suddenly cry, "Snake, snake!" that is maya. These are only qualities of the mind.

Real Detachment

In order to understand what real detachment is, you have to first of all understand the greatness and significance of attachment. Attachment is not something ignoble; it is not a dirty, psychological process. Attachment is a stepping stone to spiritual life. But when you try to break attachment forcibly, before maturity has taken place, and practise detachment, again the attachment comes.

First of all, you must correct your philosophy, impressions, opinions and reactions to your attachments to life. If I have attachment for somebody, what is wrong with that? If I am attached to any one of you, what harm is there? Well, if you suffer, I'll suffer; if you are unhappy, I'll also be unhappy; if you are happy, I'll be happy; if you are sick, I'll feel sick too. At least, in this respect, I have established union with a person to whom I am attached.

A mother has attachment for her child; she is united to her child by attachment. A boy has attachment for a girl; they are united by that attachment. Attachment is the link between individuals, and it is very important in order to form and frame a proper society. This attachment should not be broken. You should not destroy it. You must maintain it. You must utilize this attachment for the establishment of a happy, well-linked home, community and society. So, when you express your attachment to other people, you are practising, establishing and forging unity.

If you have attachment for your guru, a link will be forged, and it will be quick. About twenty years ago I was conducting satsangs in the central part of India. One night a lady came running to my room. She was nervous and said that she had just felt that her child was very ill. I asked her how she knew. She said, "I was just about to fall asleep when I saw his sick face. He was crying and I felt his body was very hot." And it was so. At that time, her child was actually running a very high fever. The child was about five hundred miles away, but she could sense it on account of her attachment.

So, in order to stabilize the oscillating tendencies of the mind, it is better first of all to establish a better philosophy of attachment in life. Practise attachment for those with whom you are not concerned, who are nothing to you. Practise attachment for them. This is the way you have to evolve. Then practise attachment with the people who don't like you. After that, practise attachment with the people who hate you. This is how you will develop real detachment.

I am talking about real detachment, not this kind of detachment that you are talking about. Once you develop real detachment, then no possibility of re-attachment will remain. You will never be shaken from the path, because you will reach a state where attachment is practised with each and every person in this great creation; not only with human beings, but with each and every thing. This is done step by step, not all of a sudden.

Eventually, you will come to a point where you begin to develop detachment, but now most of you have no idea what detachment really is. You believe that when the mind is turned away from a particular person or object, it is detachment. No! That when you do not like somebody, you have no attachment for him. No! What is detachment? When the attachment does not affect you, that is detachment. If I don't like you, it is not detachment. "Oh, you are not a good person. I don't want to live with you, please go away. We will remain friends, but we will have nothing to do with

each other. Every Sunday or holiday we'll meet." That is not detachment; that is psychological confusion! That is a sick mind's external behaviour.

A person with true detachment has love. He has supremacy of benevolence in his character. He has a feeling of oneness with everybody. He is the friend of all. But for us, detachment is something else; detachment means, I have everything to do with you, but I'm not affected by it. If you are sick, I'll bring you medicine; if you are starving, I'll bring you food; if you have fallen by the side of the road after drinking two or three bottles of whiskey, I'll take you back home; and if you are in trouble, I'll help you. You are mine, but I am not affected by it – that's all.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

All the affection and concern for each other which we used to see fifty years back seems to be totally lacking these days.

Warmth, affection, love and respect are born of circumstances. They are in everybody; every animal and human has that. But circumstances have changed. You are busy with your business from morning to night. You have so much distraction and dissipation that you can't give as much time to your wife and children as you could have thirty or fifty years ago. In the past, when there was an agricultural community, day in and day out you lived only with your family. Your interactions were so constant and consistent that you lived, slept and worked with them. But nowadays the husband goes to the factory, the wife either goes to the office or remains at home, and you come back in the evening with your worries, obsessions and your own engagements of mind. At home also you are just phoning and phoning, and then you go to parties and come back at two and three in the morning. The interactions are becoming more and more infrequent.

As a result of that, you are not able to demonstrate your love, warmth and affection. You have got them but there is

no time to express them. You can't show them. The children also miss you because they leave in the morning at eight o'clock and by the time you return they are sleeping. It is less so in India but it is very much like this in the West. Maybe on Saturday or Sunday you see them. So, in these two days only are you able to demonstrate your love, warmth and affection for them and not beyond that. On account of this we have personality problems. We are not able to give warmth and affection to our children. Besides this, children are also busy; they have much less to do with you. These are all the circumstances which are changing very fast, not much in India, but elsewhere they have totally changed.

I feel that people are trying to find an alternative way of living. You do not know it yourself, but somehow, unconsciously, most people are trying to find an alternative way of life. What could that alternative way be? I think it is to live together, discharging your responsibility and obligations but without having any attachment for each other. Live in the world, have something to do with the sense objects (*vishaya bhoga*), but don't be affected by them. In my opinion, this is the alternative way of living which people are trying to achieve. I visualize a new culture coming up, not necessarily in the near future, in fifty or one hundred years, but in the course of four or five hundred years a new culture will emerge. People might live together but they will not relate to each other, just like in a hotel.

Now, in order to live that kind of life, you need a yogic base. If you think that this world, this family, is a hotel where husband, wife and children live together without having much to do with each other, then there must be some spiritual aim. If there is no spiritual aim, you will get what are called psychological problems, and this is the reason why, in the West, people are taking to yoga, because it gives a sense of value and purpose to life. Otherwise the idea comes, "Why do I live?" Children at the age of eighteen are beginning to think, "Why am I living?" They don't see any purpose to life; then they think that if there is no purpose in

living, why not commit suicide and die immediately? But if they know that life has a spiritual purpose and they can see an aim in life, then I think all will be well.

What do you feel about this time in history?

The history of mankind has been a history of spiritual evolution. Right from the primitive stages up to our modern age, man has been trying to solve the riddle of life and trying to know something which yet remains unknown. Until a few centuries ago, things were going very well. People used to practise their respective spiritual lives, but in the last two or three centuries, something has happened to our society as a whole. People turned towards materialistic ways and their minds became extroverted. Gradually, awareness of external things that were visible to the senses dominated the mind. But with this gradual departure from inner awareness to a world of external objects, people began to feel a kind of pain and panic within.

The more one becomes extrovert, the more one begins to feel pain. So, within these last two or three decades, this great change has taken place. At the same time, people have begun trying for self-realization like never before, because they have realized that the way in which their ancestors have lived, and the way in which their community has been living, has not been a very happy example of peace and serenity.

We see around us people who are unhappy, but they always live in luxury and comfort. Because of all that, we come to the conclusion that something has to be added to our life, or something has to be eliminated or some transformation has to take place. If we have been suffering from a particular physical disease and we have been following a particular diet for the past twenty to thirty years, we should consider changing the diet. When a man has been following a particular pattern of life and that pattern has been causing problems and more problems, then he feels a need to make a departure from that pattern. That is what is happening to the people in our age. It is happening to everyone.

I would say that ours is the age of spiritual evolution. Man is at a crossroad. You are there and you say go to the right. I am there and I say go straight ahead. Another is there and he says go back, and yet another says go to the left. It is you who have to decide which way to go. If you go back, well you know exactly what is there, but what is in all the other directions is unknown to you.

All the saints, sages, scriptures, religions and thinking individuals have just said one thing: You may live in the world because you have a physical body, but your base should be in the spirit. Nobody has said anything against this. It has been said only in different ways. What is that spiritual space? Withdraw your mind and become more aware of the inner spiritual plane. This revolution, this idea will, we hope, grow.

Family Relationships

How two people can live together and not fight, I don't know. But I know one thing: where there is love there is everything. Quarrels and disagreements cannot destroy love and even if two people who love each other go their own ways, it also cannot destroy love. But there has to be love, that is important. This love has nothing to do with the quality of sexual experience, and this love has nothing to do with the quality of the mind. I think true love is inexplicable. It is a union beyond the realm of words.

If two people can live in each other's total awareness from the time of their meeting to the last moment when they depart for the grave, then that is love. Love never wanes and waxes. Personal situations sometimes come to cloud the love, but love is able to regain the situation again. So, between man and woman or husband and wife, first of all love has to be established. Where there is love, there cannot be divorce. Divorce is possible only when there is dissatisfaction, either about the other's nature and habits, or sexual response, and divorce can only take place when there is a lack of proper understanding. A culture or a community which has emotional discipline can understand that divorce is not the solution to a problem, but the beginning of another problem.

I do not know what you think, but I think that one man belongs to one woman and one woman to one man. Not only from the point of view of sex and love, but from all

viewpoints. However, when you are undisciplined and do not understand the value of manhood and womanhood, and sex is a repetition of an animal habit, then divorce is inevitable. You can't help it. I know that nobody wants it, but it has to happen because in reality most people do not understand what love is.

Love is very much misunderstood in this modern world. Dedication is a form of love; duty is a form of love; understanding is also a form of love. Sex is different from love. I do not know very much about it but I think you will agree with me that love does not look for quality. Your friend may be illiterate, ignorant, bad, negative, dirty, foolish and smelly, but you love him, that is all. People will wonder at you, saying, "What a dirty man, but she loves him so much," or, "What a dirty wife, but he loves her so much."

There are three distinct functions or aspects that control man's behaviour – passion, sex and love. You should remember this very well, especially the children and those of you who are not yet divorced. You can practise one of the three or two of the three or all three, but do not interpret sex as love. You can love anyone for the whole lifetime without having anything to do with sex. You can go on having sex without having love. You can have passion without having love and without having sex.

These three are confused by this reckless and modern society, and the emphasis is wrong. First of all, not in your interest, but in the interest of your children, you must develop love, increase the love between both husband and wife, not just by kissing, embracing and hugging. You have to find a common link between the two, for example, literature, painting, yoga, travelling, recreation, games, sports, politics. You have to find some common link so that you can sit down and talk together for at least one hour about something which is common to both of you.

Then you will have to discover the potential of your wife and the wife will have to discover the potential of the husband. You will have to discover some extraordinary appreciable

quality in your husband or wife. Don't try to discover Miss Universe or Mr Universe or you will only become frustrated. If you are in search of that, then your love will be skin deep and it is not going to become heart deep. When children have such parents whose love is heart deep, their personalities grow and they can really feel proud of them.

Socrates loved his wife very much. Socrates was a philosopher in Greece and when he used to go to the market to purchase vegetables, he would meet a few friends and start talking about *Brahmavidya*, the knowledge of the heart. He would go at ten in the morning and keep on talking up to five in the evening. His wife used to get impatient and she would come to that assembly and give him one slap saying, "Dirty man, I sent you out for vegetables and you are talking yoga here." Socrates used to sit on his porch on the ground floor and talk to the passers-by, and the madam used to abuse him so much from the top floor, "Lazy man, idle man, fit-for-nothing!" but he continued his yoga speeches. Then do you know what she finally did? She brought a pitcher full of water and poured it over him. And what was the remark of Socrates? He said, "So far, the clouds were roaming, now they are raining." She gave him the maximum chance to try and test his love. If your wife hassles you like this, she is testing your love and similarly with your husband. You can fail or you can succeed, it's up to you.

I have found many mistakes in our family life. The mother fights with her husband and tries to get all the children on her side. The father fights with his wife and he tries to get his children and his sister in his party; democratic party and liberal party, this is how the children are pulled by the mother on this side and by the father on that side. Then the children think the best place to live is on the streets. They find the atmosphere in the home unbearable. They only go there for lunch and dinner and breakfast.

Of course, it is not possible for me to speak in depth about family life because I'm not a graduate in family life myself. However, there is one thing that I am trying to understand –

what is love? All the definitions which I have heard and read, I have rejected. Where the hearts are united, there is love. Husband and wife need not carry on the sexual relationship if they don't enjoy each other; but their hearts must be united, their aspirations must be united and their responsibilities must be united.

For me, the most important thing is love and nothing else. Sex is a by-product of love; it is not the definition of love. That is important and every man and woman should know that, particularly in the West. Therefore, people in the West must make it a philosophy that sex is not the definition of love. Sex cannot be the barometer of love; it is a by-product of love. If that is the approach we take, then family life will become absolutely peaceful and harmonious.

To attain this harmony, husband and wife must both practise mantra, meditation, yoga and kirtan together. They sleep together, eat together, live together, then why not practise yoga together? Why not meditate together? When you meditate together, the brain frequencies will meet somewhere together in the ether and the brains will operate under unified frequencies. When your brains are functioning at different frequencies, then there is a difference between the two of you.

In the same way, you must also be attached to the one guru, because this guru will be guardian of your spiritual life, and everybody must have a guru for spiritual guidance and guardianship. There are many people who say that a guru is not necessary. After some years, these people are going to say that even a wife is not necessary. Later on still, they are going to say that nothing is necessary. No, this is not correct.

It is very satisfying to an egoistic person, but it is very dangerous to a sincere aspirant. You need a child to project your paternal and maternal love; you need a woman or man to project your romantic, emotional love, but you need a guru to project your devotion and dedication. So, householders must have a guru and must develop their love and should not equate sexual life with love.

In India, we think that children are products of the parents' ideal family life. If your children have gone astray, you are responsible. If your children are delinquents, then you are responsible and your failure is on account of your inadequate culture, civilization and religion. Religion, culture and civilization create the society. Society creates families. Families create children and these children again create culture, religion and civilization. The whole world has to re-think very quickly and very fast. The dangers of nuclear war are not that great. The greatest disaster is taking place on account of the state of family relationships.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

What is love?

It is very difficult for me to explain love because I have never experienced what you people call love. However, I have thought about it often because all over the world people ask me, "What is love?" I always use the word yoga, as yoga means 'union', and if love has something to do with union, then it is much better if I explain yoga to you.

Yoga is not only certain exercises or breathing techniques. It is a process of union between Shiva and Shakti, the two complementary aspects in everybody's nature. Shiva represents consciousness and Shakti represents energy. When consciousness and energy unite, a great experience takes place, which is known as kundalini awakening. When two things become one, it is called union.

I think love should also mean that. Love is not merely talking to each other sweetly. Love is not just embracing. Love is not merely saying, "My darling, my darling." That's romance. I don't mean to say that romance is unnecessary because many people do need it, just as children need toys. But there is a higher aspect of mind and consciousness, and we call it union. This union can occur between the two complementary constituents of your personality called Shiva and Shakti.

In the human body, within the framework of the vertebral column, there are two channels passing from mooladhara chakra up to ajna chakra. They are known as ida and pingala nadis. Through certain practices, such as shambhavi mudra (eyebrow-centre gazing), trataka, pranayama with kumbhaka, and kriya yoga, the forces of ida and pingala can be united.

When the energies of these two channels are united, a current is created and then the energy descends to mooladhara chakra and awakens the sleeping kundalini shakti. This union is the highest of all unions, and when it occurs, you begin to feel everybody is a part of you and that the whole world is your expansion and expression. Then you do not see any difference between yourself and others and you do not feel separate from other things. So, I have this to say about love, which in my language is known as yoga.

Paramahansa Yogananda described marriage as one of the holiest acts a man and a woman could perform. I am somewhat confused about this after hearing you say that nowadays it is a catastrophe.

If marriage is holy, why have divorce? Then you have to say, not only marriage but re-marriage is also holy. If marriage is holy, then why have extra-marital relationships? Then you have to say marriage is holy, re-marriage is holy and extra-marital relationships are also holy. If marriage is considered holy, why not prostitution? Then everything should be considered holy.

It is just a very subtle thing. Marriage should be holy, but it is not and it never has been. Throughout history, and even now in India, marriage stands for a lifetime of subjugation, where women are totally subdued by the social customs, illiteracy, ignorance, lack of self-respect and self-awareness. Then marriage works for the whole lifetime. You are married at the age of thirteen and till your death you remain husband and wife. But if people like us, who are independent, become involved in such a marriage, God only knows what would happen then.

For people who are dynamic, who have self-respect, who live for a higher goal, marriage is a means and not an end. For them, it is definitely not a holy affair. What Paramahansa Yogananda said is true regarding Indians, particularly the Hindus, but when his statement and instructions to the Hindus were repeated to people in the West, you can just imagine the effect.

How can you understand, how can you accept a system as sacred and holy which you are going to discard after just a few months? If it is sacred, then you will have to live by it at any cost, no matter what happens. It doesn't matter if your wife or your husband kicks you, or if he or she is insincere. Can you do it? If you cannot do it, it is much better to just remain single.

How can a husband and wife with different ideals and temperaments maintain harmony in the family?

It is not possible that both partners should share the same philosophy, the same religion, the same spiritual views or the same outlook. That is what we are taught in India. Hindus in particular believe that everybody has their own set of karmas, their own level or range of evolution. The husband or wife may be sattwic and the other partner rajasic, but it doesn't matter because she has her own karma and he has his. She may believe in divine incarnations and worship idols, but her husband may not. He may think that there is no God at all, but he doesn't interfere with her religious faith and she doesn't interfere with his nihilistic, communistic attitude because this is his point of evolution and that is hers.

Although husband and wife come from the same society, they are not at the same point of spiritual evolution. Therefore, if you practise yoga and your partner does not, do not worry about it or try to change it; do not wish for anything else. If your partner practises yoga, well and good. If not, let him or her follow their own evolution, their own karma, their own destiny. Thereby you will maintain peace and harmony in the home and establish a high level of energy.

Harmony does not mean total uniformity. Harmony can be achieved in opposite, difficult and conflicting stages also. Harmony is an outcome of perfect understanding. That's the only reason why, in the West, husband and wife are not able to live together for a lifetime. There are a lot of difficulties and these difficulties are not because she is different to you. It is because you both want to be the same. That's a mistake! Let an atheist wife live with a theist husband. Let a socialist wife live with a pacifist husband. Let a Protestant husband live with a Catholic wife. Let a Christian husband live with a Hindu brahmin wife.

In a piano, sitar or violin, there are different strings and they produce sounds at different pitches, but if all the strings produced only one pitch or one note, what horrible music that would be. And that is Western music. Western music is not the music of light because both strings are saying 'so'. One must say 'so' and the other 'te'.

What is the purpose of marriage in society today?

The purpose of marriage is to give two human beings the opportunity to work out their spiritual life together. Actually, it is not even necessary to marry officially; a man and woman can just live together, but sometimes this creates a type of social anarchy.

Therefore, in the past, marriage was an institution designed for spiritual efforts, but in the course of time, the spiritual purpose was forgotten. Marriage remained a social institution and the two partners became ignorant of the higher purpose of their union.

Let Your Children Grow

When a child is born, he draws samskaras from three sources. Firstly, he brings karmas with him from his previous incarnations, secondly, from his parents and thirdly, from the environment. From these sources he draws enough inspiration for the development, growth, protection or destruction and mutilation of his karmas.

Parents are very important factors and parenthood is necessarily a very important stage of life. Children like freedom – give them freedom. Children like to develop into their own image – let them develop into their own image, do not try to make them into something else. If they want to play, let them. If they want to read, let them. If they want to eat, let them. If they want to dress well or not dress well, if they want to shout, cry, or keep quiet, if they want to roll in the mud – let them do what they like.

Do not just want them to be like you. You give them a few toys and tell them, “Be good, behave well, do not shout, be ladies and gentlemen.” Etiquette, manners, culture; no! You have imposed these things on them too early. After they have completed nineteen or twenty years of their life, then you can tell them how to behave. What is etiquette and manners to children of five years old? My God, you will be murdering them by imposing your philosophy on them!

What is right for you is not right for them. If your child is five years old, then you should be at least twenty-five or

thirty. What is the difference then? At least a twenty year gap between the child and yourself. You are talking from a mind that is twenty years beyond the point where your child is. You have already travelled far. I am sixty, what am I doing to teach a child of ten? I don't know how to think like her. In order to teach children, we have to become children, think like children, then of course we can do it.

Another important point is that children of five to ten years, or even more, should always live with children of their own age. You should only act as a protector, provider and guardian. You can't be a teacher because you are too old for them. You can arrange a nice room, provide the books and this and that, but that's all! Let them live with children of their own age. Let them fight and beat each other; let them say horrible things and discuss whatever they like; let them read or not read. Of course, by law you must send them to school, but otherwise, do not worry about your children.

They have come with their own provident fund, their own karma, they have come with everything. They have their own destiny, their own future, all the possibilities of physical, mental, emotional, philosophical and spiritual growth. If your children want to talk philosophy, let them. That means, if you do not want your children to be afflicted by your conflicting personalities, the only thing that you should do – and you should do it in any case because everybody has conflicts – is give them a free atmosphere all round. Let them feel completely free and later you will find that your children did appreciate all your good karmas, but did not accept your conflicting personalities. They become completely different from you insofar as the expressions and manifestations of life are concerned.

It is a very delicate matter and I know that in western countries and eastern countries too, it is very difficult. I'm tired of telling you this, but you don't understand because for you, your children are your toys. On them you base your neurosis, all your idiosyncrasies. You look at them and you do not know why you have given birth to them. You don't

know the purpose. You call it love, but it is not love; it is neurosis, and I would say that most parents are neurotic.

If your child does not want to go to church, you tremble and say, "My God! My whole life I've had faith in the Bible; I've had faith in Christ and the church; I've not missed one Sunday. This child is talking such nonsense – 'where is God?' He can't be my child." You tell your wife, "I don't think that he's my son, he's not like me." Then you're always worried about him.

Because you are a Catholic or Protestant or Hindu, you want to make him a Catholic, Protestant or Hindu; because you practise yoga, you want him to practise yoga also, and because you dress in a particular way, you want him to do the same. If he wants to, let him. If he wants to join a yoga class in an ashram, but you don't like the place, let him still go there because his choice has to be respected, not your choice. If you are his father or mother, he is also your child. Who is superior, tell me? Who is senior, who is greater, who is more important, you or he? You can't say that you are more important. He is more important, and that is why you are afflicted and affected so much.

Throughout the world, this is a very great problem, and I do not think I will be able to give you any better suggestion than this – let your children live with nature; let them think as they like, eat what they want, say what they feel; let them believe or not believe. Let them practise yoga or bhoga. Let them be Hindus, or Christians, or Muslims, or have no religion at all. Give them total freedom to form and organize their own lifestyle, if you want to live in a new world.

Often you read articles in the magazines called 'New World', 'New World Order'. New World Order with this old stuff? We are rotten stuff, indoctrinated by our parents, slaves to their philosophy. We are following them. The path which we are walking is not our path. We are walking in their footprints. Let our children be different!

I can tell you that for a generation or two, or maybe more, there will be anarchy, turmoil, confusion, children

doing their own thing, playing football in the middle of the road with the cars going beep, beep, beep, as you see in India. But after three or four generations, everything will automatically change, a new evolution will set in, and that world order will be a spontaneous, self-created, collective world order. That world order is not a government world order. A government does not create that kind of order; society and laws do not create it, and religions certainly do not. We will just live like that, and that is called, 'heaven here on earth'.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Does the lack of understanding and mishandling by parents and society of children with awakened kundalini seriously affect their evolution?

Often children are born with great samskaras. However, society, culture and family do obstruct them and that is precisely the reason why these children are not able to develop their spiritual genius. In the last fifty years, there has been an upheaval, a turmoil or change in the western continent. Thousands and thousands of boys and girls have just tried their level best to drop out. They have taken numerous trips to India, Nepal, Tibet and Egypt in search of their own identity because they want something which is relevant to their personality. It is these boys and girls who have brought yoga and the spiritual sciences to the West. We have not brought it. We have only followed them in order to complete the task.

Due to their heightened level of awareness, these children were declared abnormal. In the early twentieth century, they were considered mad, crazy and insane, but later when they were developing the science of parapsychology, society and parents came to understand that everybody who behaves in a peculiar way is not crazy. However, in the West, facilities have still not been provided for the spiritual development of these children, because western nations want to survive on

the political and economic front, and so these facilities have to be blocked. However, in India these facilities for spiritual development have been maintained and are still open, because the culture and civilization there does not believe that political and economic survival is the ultimate aim.

Every individual has to be an individual; you have your own destiny and I have mine, and my destiny cannot be exploited for the sake of a nation or a society. If I want to be a Christian, nobody has any business to stop me. If I am agnostic and atheist or believe in many gods, nobody has any business to stop me. According to your karma you have a destiny, and according to that destiny you have to fulfil your spiritual evolution.

Human life is divided according to the stages of evolution. It is very logical and scientific. If you consider that the span of human life is one hundred years, then first you have to divide it into four parts – twenty-five years for learning, twenty-five years for work, twenty-five years for contemplation and twenty-five years for renunciation. These four stages should again be subdivided according to the changes in the hormonal, physical, biological and psychological structures.

When a child is seven, certain changes begin to take place in the body. When he is born he has a body, when he is in his mother's womb he has a body and when he becomes an adolescent he has a body. What does this mean? It means that the child is continually undergoing a process of change. Therefore, there should be a process of culturing to equate with the process of change. Our modern system has no such process. When your son or daughter is seven or eight, you just send him to school and there he gets the normal education. But his psychological and spiritual education is completely ignored. He has to become an engineer, a doctor, an advocate or a clerk, but you don't think that he should be a saint, a psychic person, a prophet or a servant of humanity. That never enters your mind.

Therefore, at the age of seven the child should be exposed to a new era of life because this is a very critical period. At the

age of seven or eight the pituitary gland begins to function and the child's attitude begins to change. Therefore, in my opinion, the child's education must be revised properly and children should be free to expose themselves to any destiny. If they want to continue their studies let them, if they want to become spiritual, let them. This is how we can create a balance in society and allow our children to evolve freely.

How can we influence the mind and destiny of our children before the age of seven or eight?

Before the age of eight, children have a different awareness and, therefore, the teaching of yoga should be provided in such a manner that they can imbibe rather than learn it. From the age of two onwards, demonstrations should be provided for this purpose. Yogic models also should be provided for them in the same manner as you provide them with toys to play with. Most of the yoga postures are named after animals and birds, so the structure of the asana in the form of models resembling an animal or a human being should be prepared.

Children have photographic minds at this tender age, and whatever they see is registered in a photographic manner. So whatever knowledge of yoga you want to provide children with should be audiovisual. Often children at the age of two or three see their parents, but cannot analyze them intellectually or even respond emotionally. They just see them and register them. Then later, when they grow up, at the age of eighteen or so they develop a personality based on the impressions provided by the parents.

A baby at the age of one, or even six months, does not understand what its parents are doing, but it registers the impressions. This is very certain and nobody should doubt this event. You cannot hide anything from your children at any time, even during pregnancy.

Consciousness functions at various levels. Your consciousness is functioning on the intellectual level. If I murder someone, you understand it and then make a judgement,

but this is not right. Often, however, your consciousness functions at a spiritual level, an emotional level and a schizophrenic level also. At the age of two, three, four, or even before two, the consciousness functions on what I would call a photographic level. This is called *samskara*.

Now, if you want your children to imbibe yoga, and then develop the impressions at a later age, say after eighteen, nineteen or twenty, thus influencing their mind, character, personality and destiny, then you have to practise yoga yourself while the children are still young.

Besides pictures or visual aids, children can also be taught through narrating stories to them. At that tender age, children may not be able to respond or react, but they definitely imbibe the whole story, and from that they take the gist. When you narrate a story to a child, it registers certain important aspects of the story and the general structure. But later, at the age of twenty or so, it can throw off the structure and just maintain the gist. That is the peculiar function of human intelligence. So, at kindergarten level, through pictures, demonstrations and through narrating stories, you can definitely make children learn yoga, and thus change the course of their destiny.

How should we introduce our children to yoga?

In India, the tradition was that at the age of seven or eight years, the child was initiated into yoga, and sent to live with the family of the guru. There were institutions run by gurus to which householders sent their children, and the children remained there with the guru. There they were taught three practices: *surya namaskara*, *pranayama* and *Gayatri mantra*. With these three yogic practices, you can maintain the psychic elements in your children.

The first practice taught was *surya namaskara*, which is a combination of twelve postures representing the twelve zodiac transits of the sun. The word *surya* means 'sun' and *namaskara* means 'salutation and prostration'. Therefore, *surya namaskara* means 'salutation and prostration to the sun'. From ancient

times the sun has been considered to be the storehouse of cosmic prana.

The second practice that children were taught was pranayama, specifically *nadi shodhana*, alternate nostril breathing. In this practice one is taught how to inhale and how to exhale. Inhale through the left nostril, exhale through the right nostril, inhale through the right nostril and exhale through the left nostril.

The third practice was Gayatri mantra. Gayatri mantra is contained in the most ancient book called the *Rig Veda*. Those who have studied the history of civilization know that the Rig Veda is the oldest book written by man. It is a collection of thousands of mantras written thousands of years ago. In the *Rig Veda* there is a mantra which has twenty-four syllables, called Gayatri mantra. It is chanted in this way: *Om bhur bhuvah swaha tat savitur varenyam bhargo devasya dhi mahi dhiyo yonah prachodayat*. This mantra was intended to improve the quality of the child's mind.

Now, it is also a theory in science that when a child reaches the age of seven or eight, the pineal gland begins to decay. The pineal gland is a remnant from animal life. Animals have a very strong, well-developed pineal gland. They are very instinctive, they can feel things. The pituitary gland is not well developed in animals. In monkeys and other mammals there are traces of the pituitary gland. The same pineal gland survives in human beings, but when you grow to seven, eight, nine or ten, the pineal glands begins to decay and finally it calcifies. When the pineal gland begins to calcify, the pituitary begins to function.

The pineal gland is a very important gland in the body. It controls all the intuitive functions. People who are clairvoyant, chairaudient, telepathic or psychotelekinetic have a developed pineal gland. By the practice of concentration on the mid-eyebrow centre, we always try to keep the pineal gland healthy. Those who have a developed or healthy pineal gland have extrasensorial perceptions, while those whose pineal gland is calcified cannot have psychic experiences.

The pineal gland also has a control over the emotions. Saints, sages and sannyasins have very strong pineal glands and so they have control over their wild emotions. Therefore, the practice of yoga should be taught to children from the age of seven or eight. It has been found that surya namaskara, pranayama and mantra help to maintain the health of the pineal gland. In kundalini yoga, it is known as ajna chakra. So, this pineal gland can control the functions of life and also the wild behaviour of the pituitary.

There are wonderful books written on the behaviour of the pituitary gland. In order for children to have balanced personalities it is necessary from the age of seven, either at home or at schools, to teach them yoga.

When should young men start the sexual experience, and how can they curb the sexual desire?

In India, it is the tradition that up to the age of seven or eight the child is only exposed to the family religious practices. Then there is a small ceremony where the child is taught three practices: surya namaskara, pranayama and Gayatri mantra. At this time, his head is shaved and a little tuft is left on the crown of the head. During initiation he is given a sacred thread of three strings. The thread represents the vow he takes, which is the vow of brahmacharya or celibacy, because sexual problems start after eight, not before that.

Up to the age of seven the child is pure, whatever he might do. After the age of eight he begins to understand the distinction between man and woman, so at this time he is given the vow of brahmacharya. The minimum period for this is twelve years, which means that up to the age of twenty he has to maintain celibacy.

But why all this? At the age of seven or eight the pineal gland begins to decay. After the pineal gland begins to decay, the pituitary gland becomes active and starts to secrete sexual hormones. As a result of this, children become overanxious about sexual life and their bodies begin to produce sexual hormones. So, through the practices of surya

namaskara, pranayama and Gayatri mantra, the health of the pineal gland must be maintained at all costs and for as long as possible.

It is not good to suppress sex. Except for a few people, whom you can count on your fingers, most people have this experience, because this is the law of nature and you must undergo the experience positively. But it has to come at the right time. Sixteen or seventeen years of age is not the right time. I am talking as one who knows the physical body also. After nineteen you can begin sexual life, but the ideal time to have the experience is around twenty-five years of age.

Now, you are keen to know the year when you are to start sexual relations, but you must also ask me when to stop them. You must stop at the age of fifty. When you are celebrating your fiftieth birthday, you must say Hari Om Tat Sat to your wife. It is good for your heart; it is good for your nervous system; it is good for your brain.

Between the age of fifty and seventy-five, you can have a very deep spiritual relationship with your wife, otherwise you are going to make a mistake. She will become monotonous to you. But if you stop at the age of fifty, you will have a deeper, better and more profound relationship with her. Anyway the question was about children, not about older people. But I think that up to the age of twenty-five you are a child and after the age of fifty you also become a child again. So, the same rules should apply to both.

Brahmacharya

Brahmacharya is of various types. It means, ‘control over the sexual patterns or formations in the mind’. You cannot become a brahmacharya just by remaining unmarried. Simply because you do not talk with someone of the opposite sex does not make you a celibate. You may not even think about ‘him’ or ‘her’, but that does not make you a celibate.

According to yoga, brahmacharya should be practised in relation to one’s station in life, one’s psychological, biological and emotional needs. It is not necessary that you should completely reject the company of the opposite sex, or that you should remain unmarried. No! Even if you are married, even if you live with your wife or husband and have the natural relationships with each other, you can still maintain brahmacharya.

Brahmacharya is of many types. Abstention from sex is not the ultimate definition of brahmacharya. Control of the sexual processes in the human mind and nature is brahmacharya, and this control cannot be obtained in one day. This control cannot be gained from abstention and rejection, but it can be gained by experiencing it, if necessary, and sublimating the experience. This is yogic brahmacharya.

There is also tantric brahmacharya. Tantric brahmacharya is the sublimation of the point of experience. In tantric practices, male and female partners have the sexual act with each other, but at the same time you cannot say that they

have violated brahmacharya – no! In ordinary life, you have sexual experience on a gross plane, which is called orgasm. But the same type and quality of experience can be had in ajna chakra – that is fantastic brahmacharya!

Where do experiences such as cognition, perception and audition come from? Where do they emanate from – tell me? If you prick a pin into your body, where do you get the pain? You get the pain where the pin is pricked, but is that the source of the pain? Is that the point of cognition? Do you experience pain there or in the brain centres? Which is the centre of cognition? Where do you perceive it?

If the centre of experienced pain is in the brain, why do you experience it where you are pricked? Because your mind is gross, not evolved, and therefore you experience pain in the body and not in the brain. However, if you are a yogi, you will experience the pain in the brain, because the pain is taking place there and not in the body. If you are a yogi, then the sexual experience will be at a different point, where the experience is emanating from, and not where the experience is finishing. Therefore, there is a gross centre of experience and an ultimate centre of experience.

Suppose you look at a flower – beautiful, isn't it? Where is the experience taking place? In the eyes? No, it takes place somewhere else. In your brain, in your consciousness, in your mind, there is a centre where all experiences are taking place. Go there! That is called tantric brahmacharya. However, many people think that ordinary sexual relations are tantra. If this were so, then even the animal act could be called tantric.

There is another practice of brahmacharya which is meant for householders. They must maintain discipline when they are sick, depressed, nervous, angry, hungry, overloaded, when they are travelling, etc. At such times, they should not indulge in the sexual act. This is the brahmacharya of discipline, and it is the second kind of brahmacharya taught to Hindus in India. It is also brahmacharya because you maintain and retain and conserve your energy.

The third type of brahmacharya is having no sexual urge in the mind, but this state is not available to everybody. This absolute brahmacharya is only for a few, and if it were imposed on all, then everybody would be in a mental hospital. I know many people who call themselves celibates, but they lead a very perverse sort of life.

Sexual union between a man and a woman is part of the natural law of evolution. In every realm of nature, union between the two forces is taking place all the time. The creation of life, energy and matter is not possible unless the positive and negative forces unite. It is not the physical body that matters, but the quantum and nature of energy. One of the most important ways of creating energy is through the sexual interaction between a man and a woman. This is the highest concept.

However, man is still bound by his instinctive nature. He does not understand this philosophy of energy. He just runs after pleasure. He does not even know that pleasure is the outcome of the union between the two energy poles. Man and woman meet together just to have a child. They do not know that the creation of that child is nothing more than the two forces of energy becoming manifest in the mother's womb. Energy interplay is the cosmic law. The sun, moon, stars, ocean and earth are all the interaction of energy.

The ultimate source of energy is prakriti. This homogeneous, omnipresent force pervades the body, mind and consciousness. It never stagnates; it is in constant motion. If you do not know how to direct this energy upwards, it finds expression in gross, empirical life. In India, the mahatmas and rishis realized this through their own experience and thus they devised a system for directing this great force which expresses itself in the form of sexual life on a gross level. This science became known as the path of tantra.

Tantra is not a path of sexual life, but a way of channelling the sexual energy from a gross to a high level. This process is not brought about by believing or following any particular line of faith. The sublimation of sexual energy for the purpose

of spiritual illumination needs a concrete process of practice. Even in ancient times practices were known to people and evidence of this can be seen in the archaeological remains from different cultures. However, these practices have been lost and man has only experienced the gross aspects of sexual life. He has not followed it back to the primal cause. In modern society, there is so much guilt, frustration and psychological disease because no one has understood the higher nature of sexual life.

According to tantra, every man and woman should know the basic fundamental kriyas --vajroli, sahajoli and amaroli. It should be understood very clearly by everyone that the ultimate purpose of sexual life is for awakening mooladhara chakra. The momentary pleasure derived from the sexual act is just a window through which you can see beyond. No doubt, there are many other ways for awakening the spiritual potential. You can do it through penance, fasting, or pranayama, but the easiest and quickest way is through the proper performance of the sexual act. That is the real purpose behind sexual life.

The experience of awakening kundalini is unbearable. The ordinary orgasm only lasts for a few seconds, and even that short period is an exploding one. Imagine if it continued for ten minutes! No one could handle it. Sexual life is a preparation for this awakening. It balances the emotions, calms the passions and minimizes the excitement of the mind, so that day by day you become more aware of the inner life.

When a man and woman live together, they represent Shiva and Shakti. Therefore, they must learn to interact with a spiritual purpose, to give birth to the manifestation of energy. Love and affection are not sinful, but there should be clarity and discipline rather than anarchy. Then the sexual act becomes a powerful means for awakening the higher consciousness.

So, there is nothing 'bad' about it because it is a part of your evolution. It is a part which is important for the evolution

of your body, mind and emotions. If you think you do not need it, then you must become a total brahmachari. But the sexual act is not at all bad, it is natural. At the same time, however, it is important for us to tame this energy and redirect it for higher experience.

Sometimes I feel very fortunate because I am not born of sin. When my father and mother met each other, they must have had full romance, beauty and bliss – thrilling and throbbing! I am born of that experience. I am not born of an experience of sin. I am not born of an experience of shamefulfulness. If my father and mother had thought that they were committing a sin, then I would have been a sinner. Wrong! I am born of the blissful union between two poles of nature's creation, the positive and negative, my father and my mother.

You must feel fortunate that you are the product of the happy union between your father and your mother, and when you unite with your partner, you must behave in the same way. The mind must be heightened; you must not think of worldly things; you must transcend your pains and sorrows and fights and quarrels; you must transcend everything, even yourself. You must even transcend the act that you are doing, even the knowledge of the room you are in. You must transcend the notion of time and space and feel that blissful state. Then a child will be born to you, and it will be a yogi.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

All religions declare that for higher experiences, one has to abstain from sexual relations. What does tantra have to say about this?

Some say that sex is necessary for procreation and many religions propagate that idea. The second view, that sex is for pleasure, is what our modern culture propagates. The third view, that sex can be utilized for spiritual experience, is propagated by tantric philosophies. This third view is

correct because awakening of kundalini and the sexual act are interrelated and interconnected, but it doesn't mean that everybody in the world who is leading a sexual life will have an awakening of kundalini.

All those who believe that through sexual interaction the awakening of kundalini can take place should remember very well that there are basic yoga practices which have to be perfected beforehand. The sexual act in itself is an animal act. It produces momentary bliss which lasts for only a few seconds and then gives way to depression and frustration. That is true with everybody.

However, by practising certain techniques of hatha yoga, which include vajroli mudra for men, sahajoli kriya for women, shambhavi mudra, kumbhaka, awareness of breath in the form of Soham, and a few other practices, you can have a more abiding experience which represents the awakening of kundalini.

Religions became puritanical because they had to survive. In order to survive in a primitive society, they had to be puritanical, otherwise they would have been destroyed. This was precisely the reason tantra could not survive, because people did not like all these revelations of tantra. And that is precisely the reason why the tantric science and philosophy became a mysterious cult. It was taught behind closed doors, because how can you tell people openly that, through sexual interaction, you can awaken the kundalini? They will not like it because most religions have declared that sex is an unholy act, although everybody is doing it.

There are very few people in the world who have never had the sexual experience. Even if they do not actually have it, they have dreamt it, and even if they do not dream it they must have seen animals cohabiting. Yet still man has deluded himself by saying that this act is unholy. Why has this unholy act survived? Why didn't God destroy it? How can creation be perpetuated through an unholy act? Why does God allow it? Why didn't nature destroy itself? Anyway, this is something for you to think about.

Tantra has dealt with this subject in great detail. Many of the books are not yet translated into English, but a few have been. There is a good book called *Vijnana Bhairava Tantra*, which has been translated into English. In the basic tantric philosophy, the sexual act is very organized. It is said that when you become perfect, when you become an adept in hatha yoga, when you have controlled your prana, your mind and your body, then you can control ejaculation. When you can control your ejaculation, you can maintain the continuity of the experience of orgasm. And when you can continue that experience, say for about two minutes, an explosion will take place, and that explosion is called the awakening of kundalini.

The experience which we have for a few seconds is so delightful, so tempting, that we want to have it again and again. If the same experience could be prolonged, say for three to five minutes, with the same intensity, imagine what would happen to you! You would be lost in transcendence; you would go into transcendental meditation, transcendental samadhi; you would never leave your sadhana!

If this experience can be held with total attention for five minutes, this is the concept of tantra in which mind and prana are brought together, employing sexual interaction.

What place has chastity in regard to spiritual evolution?

This question may be from one person, but the answer concerns hundreds and thousands of people. Chastity is not a reality. The practice of chastity is not for all. It has, foremost, something to do with one's mental, psychological and emotional behaviour. One out of a million may be chaste. Of course, it is possible for nature to produce such a person, one among millions and trillions, but why fight with yourself, and where will it lead you?

Always thinking of sex but not experiencing it is neurosis; you become afraid, insecure and guilty. What is the gain of physical purity in comparison with spiritual light? Can we not consider the other side, that we are opposing the laws

of nature? You might as well ask, “Can’t you remain without food?” or “Can’t you remain without sleep?” Or again, “Can’t you stop the breath all the time?”

We human beings will have to respect the laws of nature. We don’t want to get into a state of anarchy. Anarchy is as bad as anything. There must be cohesion in man’s behaviour in the light of nature. I am of the definite opinion that man and woman are both representatives of Shiva and Shakti. Let them come close to each other with a spiritual purpose, to give birth to the manifestation of energy. Love is not a sin; affection is not a sin, but there must be what we call clarity, there must be discipline. There shouldn’t be anarchy. Man suffers because he involves himself in anarchical behaviour. But, at the same time, if there is a chaste person among human beings, we can take off our hats to them.

Is sex a help or an obstacle in the final realization?

A knife can be a killer or a saviour depending upon how you use it. If you want to kill someone, it is a killer, and if you want to operate upon someone, it is a saviour. The sexual act has a purpose according to your level of evolution, and it can be helpful to your spiritual evolution. In fact, we have misunderstood it. Man has some sort of guilt about it and he cannot get rid of the idea that it is ‘bad’. Of course, it is a pressing demand upon your nature so you follow it. There are only a few crazy people in the world who have not had sexual experience; everybody has it. Nobody should deny it. Why deny it? It is a fact; it is a truth.

Why do you say that you are a celibate; just to tell me you are a great man? I say you are a crazy man. The natural law is not man-made; it is not a constitutional act of kings and emperors. Man did not create the law that you must go to the toilet in the morning. Man did not create the law that everybody has to sleep at night or the law that everybody must feel insecure. They are called natural laws.

What is the natural law? The law which has been created for the growth of your personality and incarnation is the

natural law and, therefore, you should understand that there is a natural purpose behind these things. In spite of everything that has been said against sexual life, it goes without saying that it is one of the most important urges of human existence that you cannot ignore. If breathing is important, if the natural functions of the body are important, the sexual act is also important. First, you have to realize this truth.

Then comes the next truth. If I ignore it, am I going to get higher experience? Okay, I might perhaps, but what about the average person? Therefore, we must first of all refer this to the tantric philosophy which says, "Through that which a man thinks he has fallen, by the same shall he rise." Tantra clearly talks about man's attitude and efficiency to direct and sublimate the sexual experience.

I am of the firm opinion that sexual life is spiritual sadhana. Therefore, please sit down with your wife and talk it over with her. Or maybe sit down with your husband and then go in search of a guru. But remember that these gurus are never famous. They are never publicized; they come unseen and they go unheard. Learn the art from them and practise it at home, and you will see one day that what I have said had some sense in it.

Lotuses in Water

With initiation into karma sannyasa, a new meaning, a new philosophy comes into your life. Everything remains the same, but the philosophy of relationships with each and every thing you are related to changes. This change is for the good; it is for a great spiritual purpose.

Our relationships with everything in life have always been very tense and painful. They have created fears, sorrows, tensions, stress and many other things which you know very well. That should change. Everything that you come across in life, every person and event, is actually neutral in nature. It is neither the source of pain nor the source of joy. But due to your defective philosophy, you have suffered, and attributed your sufferings to these events, objects and persons.

With karma sannyasa, an absolute distinction has to be made whereby no object, event, person or experience can become a source of positive or negative response. This is the philosophy of karma sannyasa. You have to live like a lotus leaf in water. A lotus out of water soon dies. It is born in water, it rises through water and blooms on water, yet water does not touch it, and if you pick up a lotus flower, it is always dry. This is how we have to live as karma sannyasins – like lotuses in water.

Sannyasins abandon worldly life. They go away and have nothing to do with it. Karma sannyasins do not enter that phase. They enter the particular phase of life where it is

necessary to move cautiously, like a tongue moves in between two sets of sharp teeth. If you are a bit careless, you know what will happen – your two sets of sharp teeth will injure or maybe destroy your tongue. With such care, the karma sannyasin has to become an expert in living between the positive and negative events of life.

Sometimes there is happiness, sometimes unhappiness; sometimes success, sometimes failure. Both knock you about like a shuttlecock, this way and that. Happiness throws you over to unhappiness, unhappiness throws you back to happiness. That is the way you are being kicked like a football, from one end to the other. In order to overcome that, you do not have to do anything different in your life. You just have to develop a new kind of philosophy.

What is that philosophy? No name can be given to it. If I say it means detachment, it does not cover the entire philosophy of karma sannyasa, because externally you will remain in the thick and thin of life. You are not going to abandon even one item. Your work, relationships, fruits of action, consequences, reversals and defeats all have to be experienced; you cannot escape anything in life.

You may close your eyes to certain events and experiences. In the desert, when the ostrich is attacked it puts its head into the sand and thinks that it is safe. You should not be like that. You cannot reject the experiences of life. They will live with you in sleep, in dreams. They will follow you throughout life. You have to work them all out. Therefore, every experience is so valuable; even if you are suffering because of your husband, wife, children, or friends, or because of certain complexes like inferiority, superiority and narcissism, or you have guilt or sin or a perverse sexual nature. You may be arrogant and obstinate, or very good and charitable; you may exploit or be exploited by your friends. It doesn't matter; you have to learn from that. You do not have to fight with your attachments; you do not have to force detachment. You can understand the depth, universality and eternity of your nature through life itself. This is the path of karma sannyasa.

Finding the Balance

Nowadays many people are seeking ways to spiritualize their life. In order to synchronize your spiritual aspirations with your day to day mundane life you must first dissolve the concept of two different kinds of lives. There is neither mundane life nor spiritual life. One stage of life leads on to another. Desire leads to desirelessness. Sensual enjoyment leads to vairagya, and attachment leads to supreme dispassion. When you are living the mundane life, you must analyze and understand the fleeting qualities of that life and, at the same time, you must remember what that mundane life has left for you – a disillusionment, a realization or a better understanding of the lower part of life or the higher part of life.

In the Vedas the rishis and munis had indicated four types of *purushartha*, four kinds of striving: dharma, artha, kama and moksha. *Dharma* means ‘virtues, qualities, good actions, good deeds’. *Artha* means ‘purpose, selfishness, motivation, objective’. *Kama* means, ‘desires and their fulfilment’. *Moksha* means ‘liberation from everything’, when the mind follows neither dharma nor artha nor kama.

Now, these four purusharthas or strivings, must be integrated and synthesized together. For one who is a householder, artha and kama are prominent, and dharma and moksha are the internal, inherent qualities or inspirations. For a karma sannyasin or a sannyasin, dharma and

moksha are prominent qualities; artha and kama may go with him. This is how the synthesis has to be done.

In fact, the Vedas have been emphasizing one single point: that one stage of life leads to another. Brahmacharya ashrama leads to grihastha ashrama, grihastha ashrama leads to vanaprastha ashrama and vanaprastha ashrama leads to sannyasa ashrama. It does not mean that you have to leave your home and do this or that. These are the automatic developments of the philosophy and the thought within your mind.

For ten or fifteen years you strive to acquire knowledge; you prepare yourself by suppressing your petty desires of sensual fulfilment, so that you may attain a degree or become a scholar. Then you enter into grihastha ashrama where you face the onslaughts of passions and desires, frustrations and attachments, hatred and love, and you adjust yourself every now and then. Sometimes you have accidents, of course, but you are trying your level best to come out of this state of conflict and confrontation. This itself is yoga and this itself is responsible for the development of your consciousness.

The *Bhagavad Gita* has eighteen chapters. The name of the last chapter is 'Moksha Sannyasa Yoga', renunciation of all karmas, and liberation. And what is the title of the first chapter? 'The Yoga of Despondency'. Can you believe that despondency, dejection and frustration can also be yoga, that they can be a means to the development of your consciousness? We agree that karma yoga, bhakti yoga, raja yoga, jnana yoga, hatha yoga, laya yoga, mantra yoga, kriya yoga and all sorts of yogas improve the consciousness. But how can frustration, dejection, disappointment and a completely broken heart be a means to the evolution of inner consciousness? That is the primary hypothesis of the *Gita*.

The *Gita* says that yoga does not merely begin with yama and niyama. Yoga does not merely begin with a religious, philosophical or puritanical discipline. Yoga begins at that moment when you are terribly angry and you are trying to balance yourself; when you are hit by passion and you

are trying to manage yourself; when you want to beat your children and your wife or when you want to leave your husband, but you say, "Think again," and when you hate people, but still you say, "No, I should not." When you are completely exhausted with the business affairs of your shop, or your family, and you want to commit suicide, go away, or do something wretched, immediately you say, "No, I must stay." That is balancing. This balancing act is the primary and the preliminary first step in yoga.

Therefore, the first chapter of instruction on yoga by Krishna to Arjuna is called 'The Yoga of Despondency'. When you are facing calamities, when you are in total darkness, when it appears that nobody loves you, when you begin to feel that there is nothing in your life that you can achieve besides this Rs. 450-700 a month, or that your wife is not going to improve, and that your life is going to get no better, and that your business is not going to increase; it is at this time that you have to practise what we call yoga.

Mundane life is not another compartment; spiritual life is not another compartment. It is you who are experiencing that and it is you who want to experience this. From that mundane life to this spiritual or yogic life, there is a bridge and in between that is not 'no man's land'. There is a process that deals or relates with consciousness, mind, buddhi, intellect, ahamkara, emotion. We have to tackle these by the practice of yoga, karma yoga or whatever.

If you read the *Yoga Vashishtha*, which is a dialogue between Sri Rama and Sage Vashishtha, you will find this subject discussed very well. At the age of twelve there was a great change in Sri Rama. He lost interest in his life. He did not clean his teeth, he did not bathe on time, he did not go hunting and play sports, he did not attend the court, nor did he eat meals with his parents as Hindus do.

So, Dasharatha, his father, went to him and asked, "Rama, what is this indiscipline? Why are you so sad? Why are you so disinterested?" Rama replied, "My father, I have realized that the whole of creation is a myth and everything

is subject to time, decay and death. Nobody in this creation is permanent. All that we do in the kingdom, the administration and so on, is on account of vasanas, hidden desires in the jiva. It is on account of our own passion that we talk about these things.”

Dasharatha said, “Rama, what is happening to you? You are talking such great philosophy and I have heard about it from my guru, but I think you are making a mistake somewhere. It is not that you are talking about a wrong philosophy; what you say is right. I agree that creation is impermanent, enjoyments and pleasures are impermanent, life is very short and whatever we accomplish is a result of our hidden desires, both good and bad. But still I feel there is something wrong somewhere, which you are not able to handle. Why don’t you go to your guru and tell him these things?” Rama said, “I’m not going anywhere. I sit in my room from morning to evening and from evening to morning doing nothing, thinking nothing, meeting no one.” He was facing what we call a type of melancholy and depression.

When Rama did not go to his guru, Dasharatha went and informed him about Rama’s condition. Guru Vashishtha came to Sri Rama and found him sitting alone in his asana. Vashishtha blessed him by touching the top of his head and said, “Rama, let us have a discussion.” Rama and Vashishtha discussed the philosophy of life, the nature of creation, the nature of self, the interaction of matter, energy and consciousness with each other. Finally, Rama was enlightened. He came to realize one thing, which I am going to tell you. Those who consider mundane and spiritual life to be two separate compartments do not talk about the truth, because there cannot be two truths; there can only be one.

That is how Rama was pacified. Then he began to rule his kingdom and the rest of the story you can read about.

Glimpse into Yoga Vashishtha

Yoga Vashishtha is the name of one of the most ancient and famous scriptures of India. The name literally means ‘the yoga of Sage Vashishtha’, Vashishtha being the name of a great rishi or seer. He was the guru of Lord Rama, a great emperor, and also the family guru (*kula guru*) of a ruling dynasty of ancient India called the Solar dynasty. The scripture takes the form of a dialogue between Rama and Vashishtha in which the question is raised as to whether karma (duty and work) or renunciation is most conducive to spiritual illumination. Vashishtha says that both are necessary. A bird needs two wings in order to fly and, in the same way, for the spiritual flight, the two wings of fulfilment of one’s duty and inner renunciation are also required.

The dialogue concerns the dilemma of Rama in his relationship with life. When he was young he was sent to live with his guru for twelve years, but when he returned he began to neglect his duties and did not participate in family affairs. He became depressed and took no interest in his family and friends. He used to sit in his room and brood and lead a very undisciplined life. His father, Dasharatha, became perturbed and, summoning Rama, confronted him, saying, “My son, you have lived with your guru for twelve years and when you came back we expected you to fulfil your commitments, obligations and responsibilities. What has happened to make you completely withdrawn and disinterested in life?”

Rama replied, “I am not interested in this world because everything is evanescent. Every pleasure is temporary. I see no fun in relating myself to the frivolities of life. Why should I participate in life when it is so transitory? What is the use of pursuing the affairs of life if they are to come to an end? Life is so short and uncertain that one doesn’t know whether one will live for another second. The more one does karma, the more one develops samskaras (mental impressions); the more one develops samskaras, the more one has pains; the more the pains, the greater the anxieties and worries, and the more one gets entangled in life and death. This continuous circle will never come to an end, so I am withdrawing myself.”

His father became worried and asked Sage Vashishtha to set his son’s philosophy in order. The resulting dialogue forms the text of the *Yoga Vashishtha*. Guru Vashishtha tells Rama of the secrets of spiritual life and the relationship between karma and realization. He explains that it is not at all necessary to renounce karma and only do meditation. Many people are misguided and think that they have to leave work because, by working, they accumulate more karmas and more samskaras. They think that by performing karma they become impure and contaminated, and for this reason they retire from the active arena of life. Vashishtha makes it clear that this is not at all necessary. What is important is that one should aspire towards spiritual life while continuing to live in the world.

Another point to be considered is that meditation without karma yoga does not bear tangible and real results. Fulfilment of desire and ambition is necessary for spiritual growth. Karma is essential for spiritual progress. Man is made up of desires; if he has no desires, he cannot live. But we suffer from guilt. On account of this guilt, we often convince ourselves that desires are not present, and that if they do exist they are not to be accepted.

What is karma? Karma is the rendering of desire into action; the expression or external form of ambition is karma. You have desire and that makes you work. So a desire is

translated into karma. Those who do not perform karma do not give free expression to their desires, and these desires remain suppressed. Desires are threefold: desire for progeny and procreation, desire for wealth and desire for sensual pleasure. These are the three broad classifications of desire. You have to fulfil all of them. If you don't, they will remain suppressed, and if your desires are suppressed, you cannot progress in spiritual life, no matter what meditation you do. Therefore, the karmas that you perform are a process of elimination of suppressed and unexpressed vasanas (latent desires). As such, renunciation of desires is not tenable.

A story is narrated in the *Yoga Vashishtha* about a king who was overwhelmed by vairagya, the sense of dispassion. He renounced his kingdom and went to practise meditation and penance in the jungles, far away from his kingdom. In his absence, his wife, Queen Chudala ruled the kingdom. Though the king did not know it, Chudala was already an enlightened yogini. One day she realized that her husband was wasting his time and decided that she would guide him.

So she transported herself psychically to the place where her husband was meditating. She levitated in front of him and the king opened his eyes. "What are you doing here?" he asked. She replied, "I am here to tell you that while ruling your kingdom I have attained siddhis, and that while doing sadhana and meditation you are asleep." The king was thunderstruck, but realized that his wife was telling the truth.

He asked her to instruct him in spiritual life. She said, "Material life can never contaminate spiritual life. Money and desire cannot touch the spirit because they are eternally different entities." If you mix water and petrol, they will always remain separate. Likewise, material life and spiritual life are totally different. Those people are misguided who think that worldly life can contaminate spiritual life.

When you identify yourself with karma, then you suffer. Karma itself is not the cause of suffering. Your identification with karma is the cause of suffering and this identification with karma is a kind of neurosis. Therefore, according to the

Yoga Vashishtha, one must take care of one's innate identifications, rather than reacting obsessively for or against one's karma. Sage Vashishtha explains to Rama about time, space, object, idea, imagination, emotion, and their relationship to man's spiritual progress and also to his bondage. How does desire bind a man and how also does it make him free? You love and you hate; where do these passions bind you and where do they make you free?

Sage Vashishtha narrated another story about a king and his queen who was called Lilawati. One day, both of them were sitting talking about politics and family affairs. The queen was sleepy and she dozed off. She had a dream in which she became old and died. She was reborn, became a child, then a young woman, got married, had children, became old again and died. Seven times she was reborn, went through the life process and died. Then she woke up. Hardly two minutes had passed and the king was still talking. In that short time, she had had the experience of seven lives and that experience was real to her because she enjoyed her childhood and youth, loved her different husbands and children and also suffered in old age. Everything was real in the dream from the point of view of experience. Of course, when her level of consciousness returned to the wakeful state, the experiences had no relevance, but nevertheless she had undergone them.

In the same way, if you raise the level of your awareness, then what is happening to you now, the mental and emotional situations that you are confronting in life, will be as irrelevant as the dream experiences of Lilawati. When Lilawati was undergoing the dream experiences they were real to her, but when she changed the level of mind then, and only then, did they become relative. In the same way, the experiences which we have now, whatever they are, the people we meet, our emotions, our actions, seem to be real and valid, but from a higher level of awareness they appear to be unreal. After all, the experiences we are undergoing are not absolute but relative.

Sage Vashishtha explains to Rama that there is not one, but many levels of experience. In each level you have what appear to be real experiences, but when you transcend that level, then those experiences have no validity. Seemingly valid and real experiences are those with which the mind identifies, nothing more. If you think that the way to gain spiritual knowledge is to renounce karma and duties, then you are misguided and have missed the whole point of spiritual life. Karma is relative and jnana, knowledge, is also relative, because they are both experiences of the mind, and any experience which we have through the mind is not absolute but limited. In order to have absolute experience, you must transcend the mind, and you cannot transcend the mind unless you transcend karma through karma.

Sage Vashishtha said to Rama, "You will have to work to become king and rule your subjects. You will have to administer, create proper law and order and many other things, and there is no harm in that, but you must remember one thing; everything is an idea! Jnana is an idea and karma is an idea; renunciation is an idea as well as desire and passion. Even spiritual experience is an idea. After all, the whole world is maya, the conglomeration of ideas."

Sage Vashishtha closes his instructions to Rama by saying, "Even if the world is unreal, participate, because even that participation is unreal. Even if all that is happening is stupidity, continue to participate. Be stupid with the stupid, foolish with the fools."

You can become an emperor, a general, a swami, an administrator, housewife, trader, businessman, artist, engineer or even a prostitute. These are all expressions of your karma. As Sage Vashishtha said, "Oh Rama, even though you will rule a kingdom, it does not stand in the way of spiritual life. Renunciation of objects and duties is not renunciation; it is renunciation of idea or identification that is important. One must fulfil obligations, the duties of nature. Then, and only then, will they not come into direct confrontation with spiritual life."

Karma

Everything in the universe is run under a perfect law, the law of karma. When we hear the word karma, we always think it refers to action or work, but in this context karma does not merely mean action. Everything has an inherent motive or action which means, whether visible or invisible, it is under a definite law, defined and destined by nature. Fire burns – that is its action; wind blows – that is its action. Now, as man is a part of this universe, when we discuss the law of karma, we are referring to man in particular. The advent of man, his life and home, his exit from the scene and his re-emergence, that totality is all based upon certain laws.

Nature or prakriti is the governor, the director of this great universal law. In accordance with this law, man is born, he suffers, undergoes pain and pleasure and accomplishes his inevitable destiny. Human incarnation is a consequence of the evolution of nature. Prakriti has been able to accomplish this model of man after trials and errors for over 8.4 million incarnations. Even when we study modern science, we come to the conclusion that the human body is a consequence of the formation of millions and millions of species. During past incarnations in those 8.4 million bodies, nature has been fulfilling the great task of evolution entirely by herself. She has supervised the evolution of consciousness through these incarnations, but when she formed the human body there emerged a special item in life which is known as the karma

of the individual. After this, prakriti became somewhat free and independent, because subsequently it was man's own karma which would automatically decide his further evolution, pleasures, enjoyments, losses and gains. Prakriti only remained in the human body as a supervising force.

With the emergence of the human incarnation, certain urges remained with man from previous incarnations. These urges are eating, sleeping, fear and copulation. In addition to these, nature developed in man what we call jnanam or awareness of time and space and his own existence in relation to the whole universe. On the basis of this awareness, man was supposed to decide his own course of action. He developed his own desires, ambitions and forms of pleasure and pain. Propelled by his desires, man created karma for himself and established the course of his future incarnations.

Even with the destruction or demise of this human body, the consciousness of man continues to be affected by the desires he cherished during his lifetime. Of course, the body is by no means man; it is just a vehicle, a transporter. Within this body resides the atman, or what we call the self. Besides this spirit there is another important factor, the driving force, which is called buddhi or intelligence. The atman is the actionless non-doer and non-enjoyer. It is a silent witness to all that is happening. Buddhi or intelligence is the driving force which plunges man into fulfilling desires.

There is an illustration to make it clearer. Imagine a four-wheeled chariot with a driver and five horses. A passenger is seated behind the driver. This symbolizes the whole of our existence. Now this buddhi is the actor or doer, it is the driving force, but the chariot is moved by the five horses. If the horses are not under control and if the buddhi or driver is heavily drunk and has gone crazy, the passenger is going to meet with a terrible fate. However, if the horses are properly trained and the driver is in control of his senses, then the passenger is going to meet with a different fate. In any case, the atman is untouched and unconcerned. It is just

there and it does not matter what happens to the chariot, the horses or the driver. Either the chariot will reach the decided destination or, on account of the untrained horses or drunken driver, it will meet with a fatal accident. These are the two types of karma which we face in life. Therefore, when we talk about karma, we should combine the buddhi, the senses and the body, and remember that whatever happens to the chariot (the body), the driver (buddhi) or the horses (the senses), the passenger (atman) remains a silent witness and is not affected by anything that is happening around him.

In one of the major Upanishads known as *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, there is a beautiful hymn about two birds sitting in a fruit tree. One is perched on an upper branch and the other on a lower branch. The bird on the lower branch is constantly pecking at all the fruits. Finding each one bitter, it spits it out. The bird on the upper branch is not interested in tasting any of the fruits, it just watches its friend sampling and spitting them out. Finally, the bird from the lower branch looks up and says, “Hey, you are not eating the fruit!” The bird from the upper branch quietly replies, “My friend, I have already tasted those fruits and I don’t want any more. But why do you peck at all of them? You must decide if you are going to eat or not and then eat fully, whether the fruit is bitter or sweet. If you don’t want the bitter, why do you eat at all, because the whole tree bears the same type of fruit? It is not that one is going to be bitter and another sweet. With your intellect, you should understand that this tree only bears bitter fruit.”

The bird on the lower branch said, “Okay, my friend, then let us leave this tree to find a better one.” And so the story goes that they flew from one tree to another, visiting thousands of trees, and each time they had the same experience. Finally, they came to a place to rest. It was evening and they were exhausted, frustrated and broken. This tree was enormous with lots of leaves, but had no fruit. The senior bird said, “My friend, we have now come to a tree where you are not going to eat and you are not going to spit.”

The tree represents the incarnation of the human body, the senior bird represents the atman or supreme consciousness and the junior bird represents the individual soul, the jivatman or buddhi. Propelled by desires for pleasure, this individual self or jivatman migrates from one body to another in search of its fulfilment. Each time it migrates, it takes its own samskaras and impressions along with it, and so the hankering persists. The different physical bodies that the jivatman inherits are endowed to it by virtue of its karma in previous incarnations. Every experience is indestructible and they leave behind a seed or impression latent in the individual soul. Millions and trillions of samskaras or impressions (otherwise known as archetypes) are accumulated during the thousands of migrations a jivatman undergoes.

Every cherished desire and every act and experience becomes a seed in the deeper layers of consciousness. Everything that you do through your five senses or through your mind, even though it may appear to be gross, has a subtle counterpart within your own self. In the same way that words are recorded by a tape recorder, the subtle reflection of each act you perform is recorded in what we call the cosmic mind.

Every action, whether it be mental or physical, is recorded in symbolic form as a samskara or archetype. Have you seen the seed of any plant or tree? If you look at the seed, you cannot see the plant inside it, but the seed itself contains the whole plant, the whole karma. The entire tree is contained within the seed in a dormant potential state. In the same way, all that we do through the mind, the buddhi and the physical body, consciously or even unconsciously, is recorded within the self. This means that the deeper personality of man is embedded within millions of samskaras or seed formations.

According to Samkhya and Vedanta philosophy, the samskaras are recorded in the *sukshma* or subtle body. Every experience is first received through the senses, then it is conducted to or recognized by the mind. Every cognition is later transferred to the subconscious mind and then,

after some time, it is transferred to the total unconscious. Henceforth, these samskaras or seed formations become effective in every life and in every circumstance. Our present incarnation, our present karma, personality, motives, desires, failures and accomplishments are consequences of the totality of the seed formations which we carry within us even today. In every incarnation, new seed formations are added and the old seed formations are experienced and exhausted. Accordingly, there are three grades of karma. The first is made up of the seeds which are already formed, the second comprises the seeds being formed and transferred to the subtle body, and the third grade is the old seed formations coming to the point of fructification.

Let us understand it in a very practical way. You bring a thousand grains and put them in your storeroom. When the proper season comes, you take one thousand grains and sow them in your field. These seeds will grow into plants that will blossom and give fruit once again. At the end of the season you collect the seeds and add them to the stock in your storeroom. Again the season will come and you will sow a few thousand grains in the field. They will produce fruit and you will eat them. They may be good, sweet, bad or bitter, it doesn't matter. Then, at the end of the season, you collect the seeds and bring them to the storeroom. This is the process of karma in our lives. Our present life is a consequence of the past karma. While we are experiencing the consequences of past karmas, we are also generating new karma. We should never think that there are important karmas that are registered and certain insignificant karmas that are not registered. In the realm of prakriti, not even a minor action or experience goes unnoticed and unaccounted for. This is not the law of man but the law of nature.

Without going into further details, let me sum up that this life is nothing but the play of karma. We have sown and we are reaping, we are sowing and we shall reap. Life is continuous and life is eternal; death is only a full stop before the next sentence. The body does not represent the whole

truth of creation. Besides the body there is buddhi and there is the atman, the soul, which represents the totality of truth and existence.

So, the tree of the parable represents the spiritual awareness to which we have ultimately arrived. We have eaten fruits from different trees and have been spitting them out all along, but I think it is now time for us to realize the truth uttered by the superconsciousness. Let us therefore come to that tree in the evening of our experience when we no longer desire the fruits. As the poet, Robert Frost, wrote:

*The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.*

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

What is karma and what should our attitude be to our personal karma? Can we change our karma and how?

Karmas are threefold: accumulated karma, current karma and fructified karma. The fructified karma is called destiny. You must undergo that; there is no way out. However, you can control the current karma. If you have sufficient will-power, if you get the help of higher powers, you can control the quality of present karma.

In order to deal with the present karma, you must attend satsang. You must live with saintly personalities. You must try to search for positive environments so that your habits are reformed, your thoughts are reformed, your personality and character are reformed. By coming to the ashram, you are influencing your present karma positively. If you don't influence the present karmas, they will accumulate and then they will fructify. So nip them in the bud. Accumulated karmas are also very difficult to control and you can't nullify them, but there are still ways and means to balance them. You should do penance, live a simple life, abstain from

sensual enjoyments from time to time, and practise dhyana yoga. You must practise a lot of mantra yoga. When your karmas are very crude and when you realize that you have done a lot of evil karmas in the past, then you must set about to nullify them. If you do not do this, then they will fructify in course of time.

The third type of karma is destiny, which must come to pass. Man has no way out of it. For that, you have to change your philosophy and nature, that's all. Once you are born in the human body you have to face destiny, but with a difference. If you are a person with a wise philosophy, then you will face destiny with wisdom. However, if you are a foolish and ignorant person, you will face your destiny while crying and crying. To meet destiny, there is only one way – you must have a great philosophy!

Still, I must tell you that the doctrine of karma is very mysterious and to get out of the cycle of karma, you have to work very hard, not just a little bit.

What is the relationship between destiny and free will?

In Samkhya yoga and some other philosophies, there is a lot of discussion about it. In yogic terminology there are two terms. One is *prarabdha* or destiny. Destiny is a part of the evolutionary plan. It is the outcome of the constant accumulation of karma. If you see a fruit in a basket or a flower, you must presuppose that they come from a tree or a plant. The fruit and flower are only the destiny of the tree. The other term is *purushartha*, which means free will. These two schemes, these two universal laws, should be understood properly. The fructification of the totality of karma or acquisitions of life is known as destiny. Birth, as well as death, is an outcome and a part of that whole plan which is called destiny.

Now what is *purushartha* and free will? *Purusha* means 'spirit' or 'higher consciousness'. When you have disidentified yourself from the body and the senses, when you begin to experience the higher things, then you have experienced the *purusha*, the higher consciousness. When this is achieved, it is

neither conditioned by time and space nor limited by destiny. It is beyond destiny and can thus become a creator. But this does not happen to everyone. One in a million highly evolved souls may become like this.

How much of our destiny should we accept and how much should we seek to change?

When we are weak minded, we have to flow with the current of life, but once we can gain strength by concentration of mind, by resolute willpower, then we can definitely shape our destiny and change the course of events. Mankind has done it and will continue to reshape his own destiny.

In order to change the shape of destiny and the quality of life, you will have to discover the inherent laws. Scientists discovered the inherent laws of nature and were thus able to conquer or exploit nature to a great extent. Even as scientists have conquered and utilized nature and have done many things which were considered literally impossible, in the same way, man will have to discover the laws of mind and body and the laws of the forces within us. As you go on realizing the secrets of your inner nature, you become more and more capable and then you can utilize those forces for reshaping both life and destiny.

Can you explain positive and negative destiny?

Negative destiny and positive destiny will come and go like day and night. Negative destiny is *dukha* or pain; positive destiny is *sukha* or pleasure. When pleasure comes to us, we become puffed up. We are intoxicated and we think this experience will never come to an end. We do not realize that positive destiny is subject to change.

So, during the periods of positive destiny or *sukha*, we should become very humble in our attitude. We should also be very sensitive during these periods because the day will pass and the night will come. Throughout the periods of happiness we should live as though we were in pain, then only can we face the negative destiny.

However, things usually happen differently. During negative destiny or dukha, we are broken completely. We curse God and humanity, we curse nature and we curse ourselves. We say, “Why have you punished me? What did I do to deserve this? Why is God so cruel?” And we always pray, “God, please put an end to this. I can’t take any more.”

When we have positive destiny, we become proud and say, “Yes, I built up this business. I brought this car from West Germany myself. Through hard work, skill and good judgement, I built this beautiful house with my own hands.” God is not in the picture. During times of suffering, God is always in the picture, but during unhappiness he is never present. ‘I’ is always the chief figure. What is more, whenever we pass into a phase of pleasure, we are immediately changed. Within a few days we begin to talk differently, our voices are lighter, our thoughts become positive and our conversations are cheerful. We completely forget we had a dark night. So, to deal with karma, samskaras and vasanas, we must be very careful in maintaining the correct attitude towards our destiny. Remember that destiny is inescapable and everybody has to face it whether they are saints or sinners, householders or sannyasins; destiny cannot be avoided.

Why is the soul transmigrating?

The soul follows you life after life. It has nothing to do with what you are doing; it is not the experiencer of pleasure or pain. It does not share your joys and it does not participate in your sorrows. It is a silent spectator of this voyage of life. Therefore, never ask what happens to the soul, or why is the soul transmigrating. But for this transmigrating person, one day, one glimpse of that soul is enough to make him a *jivanmukta*, a liberated being.

Today you do not see that soul, you read about it in books, but you do not experience it. In the next life also you may not experience it. Maybe hundreds of lives will go by before you are able to see it. But once you have realized the fruitlessness of all that you have been doing in the past,

and you are willing to see an alternative way of existence, or you can stop somewhere for a while and think, "What is all this I'm doing?" Perhaps at that time you will get a glimpse of it. And when you get a glimpse, you are blessed forever. It is only for that momentary glimpse that the higher soul is following you in every world. So, never think the soul is transmigrating. Your destiny is transmigrating. Your desires are transmigrating, your passions are transmigrating. Your will to live and enjoy is transmigrating . . . until that glimpse.

What is the role of humanity and where is it going?

I am not a doomsday prophet. I have good hopes for humanity. I don't feel a disaster coming. I don't think a major portion of humanity will be eliminated. I see that people will grow better and better. I know that in the past, humanity was suffering, but now we are free to lead a spiritual life. Never before in the history of mankind did a spiritual renaissance take place on such a world-wide level as is happening today. Not only adults and old people, even young children are now following the spiritual path.

Of course, there is one important thing we have to remember. In this age, if we devote ourselves to spiritual discoveries, then we will have a much better society. Due to technological advances, we now have plenty of time. Formerly, we had no technological conveniences. Now we can cook our food very quickly. We can reach anywhere in the world in a few hours, and so we have much more time available to practise yoga. Earlier, man had to strive hard. On foot he could only go four miles an hour, now he moves at a speed of six hundred miles per hour by plane. Therefore, with the technological comforts afforded to us, we should not waste time, mind and money in those ways which do not help us spiritually.

So, I see the sunrise or silver linings on the horizon. Of course, I feel it as an optimistic person. I am aware of many prophecies about doomsday. I have read those manuals and I do not agree. I do not believe that these things will happen.

Philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita

For many centuries, the *Bhagavad Gita* has inspired spiritual seekers, Indians as well as non-Indians. This small book of seven hundred verses is a dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna prior to the battle of Kurukshetra.

Two armies were flanked opposite each other ready to fight. Arjuna was the commander-in-chief of one army and Krishna was his charioteer. When Arjuna saw armies of all his relatives flanked on the battlefield, he became disillusioned with life and refused to fight. Then Krishna gave him instructions as to how he should act, and these instructions contain the essence of the yogic philosophy. Therefore, the *Bhagavad Gita* is known as the science of yoga.

The *Bhagavad Gita* has eighteen chapters. The first chapter is known as the 'Yoga of Despondency'. For the most part, we think that yoga begins with asana and pranayama. Many believe that yoga begins with discipline and self-control. However, the *Bhagavad Gita* contends that yoga begins at the point when you are facing great disappointments, when you are totally disillusioned with life, when you are depressed and facing gloom, when your mind is at breaking point. What do you do at such a time? Just think, do you make a compromise with the situations of the mind, or do you try to improve the situations? Even the weakest of persons, even the most ignorant, will try to improve the situation.

In order to make this clear, look back on your life at some situation which you faced when the mind was completely broken, when you were facing nervous breakdown, when your mind was full of conflict and you were being pulled equally from both sides, when the tears flowed from your eyes, when your heart was full of agony and anguish, when you did not know exactly what you had to do, when you became angry and wanted to run away from the situation or commit suicide, when you knew the truth but could not accept it at that time.

Remember any of those situations when your mind was being torn apart by two sides which were equally strong. What did you do at that time? I think most people try to come out of it. A few may not; they may just succumb, take poison quickly and die, become crazy and go to a mental hospital, or just pick up a revolver and kill somebody. Many people surrender completely to difficult situations, but most do not. They try to hold their balance, and this attempt to come out of the situation is the beginning of yoga.

When you try to assert your mind during periods of problems and trouble, that is the first chapter of yoga in your life. So, self-control, discipline, giving up of wine, meat, women and smoking is not the first chapter in yoga. The first chapter is when you become aware of the depression and disturbance in your life and try your level best to get out of it. That is the first chapter.

Another important point discussed in the *Gita* is that the whole of life is a process of yoga. You cannot make two different compartments out of life. You cannot say, "This is yoga and that is not yoga." Yoga is not only the practice of asana, pranayama and meditation. From dawn to dusk, whatever way you choose to live, that is yoga, and that is the central theme of the *Gita*. Krishna says, "Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you give and take and whatever sufferings and happiness you undergo, all that is yoga."

Pain purifies you, and in the same way, every situation you face in life is meant for your evolution. Even when

your body is ailing, your lovers have deserted you and the situations in life are very hard, do not accuse destiny and God; do not say that God has cursed you. It is an insult, just as it is an insult to say that a mother punishes her child. No. A mother loves her child, she cannot punish him, and God cannot punish you.

All these things that come into your life are meant to accelerate your evolution. If you suffer from physical disease, you will learn to live in a healthier way. If you get into some trouble due to misbehaviour, you will learn how to behave better. Therefore, every element in life is a part of yoga. You suffer on account of your relationships and identification with situations. Nothing in this world is a cause of suffering. No. You are responsible for your own sorrows. It is just your identification with external things which brings grief.

Remember that you have a mind which can think; you have an intellect which can make judgements; you have a subconscious mind which can remember things and which makes you aware of yourself; and you have an ego. It is due to this ego that you love, hate and feel happy or sad. If you are bold, it is due to ego; if you feel inferior that is also ego. You may be suffering from delusions of grandeur – that is your ego. Our behaviour and our feelings are related to our ego. Therefore, the *Gita* says that the relationship between the ego and the circumstances of life is responsible for pain and suffering. If you can detach the ego from the situations of life, then there will be no suffering.

When there is no involvement of ego, the mental reactions are different. That is true, not only with health, but with everything in life, with human beings, business, relatives, lovers and friends. It is all just the involvement of ego. The wise one should continue to work. He should carry out all his obligations and duties and not neglect what is expected of him. As a housewife or an office clerk, you must perform the work expected of you; as a ruler of a country, a commander-in-chief of an army, you should carry out the duties you have agreed to perform, and similarly in every situation.

However, there should be one difference. Do not identify your ego with the situations. Think, “I am only an instrument, I am an agent, I am not the doer.” This is the spirit of karma yoga. But the central theme of karma yoga is even more important. Why do you suffer? Why do you enjoy? Why do you love? Why do you live? What is the purpose of this life? Why don’t you throw everything away and leave this life? Why are you doing all these things which ultimately have no sense and logic? You build a big house, then you die or an earthquake comes and your house falls down. It would have been much better if you had not built it at all!

If you make a study, you will find that there is an absolute logic behind everything. This outside world is an expression of the mind that you have inside. It is a manifestation of your desires, passions and ambitions, and if you do not work through them, then you do not exhaust your karma. In short, this world is an outcome of your karma, and if you do not exhaust this karma, you cannot be liberated.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

What is the significance of karma yoga in spiritual development?

When you do an action with certain motives, it is called karma, but when you do an action without any motive or personal interest, then that becomes karma yoga. When you do some action with a motive, what happens? You are always aiming at the consequences, the results. It affects your mind; you are never sure as to what you are going to lose. If you have a business, you have an interest in it. If you have a shop, you have an interest in it. So, whatever happens in the shop or business affects your mind and changes its structure. But when you practise karma yoga, the mind remains untainted, even when one is suffering from nervous breakdown.

Nervous depressions and nervous breakdowns are the consequences of your relationships with the results of the karma. Some people have strong minds and so they get out

of the crisis, but many people are very weak and they get into it. If something goes wrong in life, then depression follows. It may not follow directly; disappointment comes first, some sort of melancholy follows that, then fear complexes, then suicidal tendencies and nervous depression and breakdown, heart attack, and then – finality! The whole thing follows as the consequence of man's involvement with the results of karma.

If such people come to yoga for help, they should be involved in karma yoga. Then, immediately, the relief will begin. In the path of spiritual development karma yoga is the basic yoga. There are three major hurdles in spiritual experience. The first hurdle is called impurity of mind, the second is called distraction of mind and the third hurdle is hallucination of mind. The hallucinations of the mind, the distractions of the mind, can be handled through bhakti yoga, and the impurities of mind can be handled through karma yoga.

How can we transform our karma through karma yoga?

Everyone should transform their daily activities through the philosophy of karma yoga. The purpose of your daily work should become spiritual, or rather you should realize nature's spiritual purpose behind your karma. If you renounce your karma your mind will not find a basis for evolution. Before you can realize the role of karma yoga in relation to spiritual evolution, you must first understand that the purpose of karma yoga is to create a stable base for the mind. In meditation the mind has to remain constantly on one object without any interception of another idea. But if you keep on practising this without having attained the state of sattwa or balance, without having purified the mind, you will only fall back into a tamasic state. In order to prevent this, the practice of karma yoga was designed by nature for everyone, because we all have ambitions, desires and passions.

In the pursuit of daily life, our attitudes towards karma have become purely materialistic. Every time we think about

spiritual life, we think in terms of renouncing karma. In the ashram also, if you ask anyone to do some work, they invariably refuse on the basis that all actions are maya, and by this man is bound. But it is not true; karma can never be a cause of bondage. Nature has created karma as a scheme for man's evolution, an aid towards knowing the behaviour and deeper stages of the mind, and through the mind to achieve spiritual awareness.

Mind and spiritual awareness are not two different things. At one stage there is milk, at another stage the milk becomes curd, at a third stage the curd is churned into butter, at the fourth stage it is clarified into ghee, and finally at the fifth stage it becomes part of your curry. In the same way, at one stage there is the gross body, at another stage the vasanas or passions, at the third stage the psychic experiences, and at the fourth stage the supreme reality.

Atma or the supreme reality manifests itself at different stages. The mind is one of these stages and you cannot obliterate the mind. You can only purify the mind and remove the dross, the samskaras. Then, at the very nucleus or basis of the mind, atma or chaitanya will be revealed. Therefore, karma yoga is any action which is done with higher awareness, for the sake of the work, because work keeps the mind and body occupied. Even if the work does not pay you in terms of money, still you do it without worrying about the result or outcome and without considering yourself as the doer.

If householders wish to transform their daily karma into karma yoga, first of all they have to accept the role of karma in spiritual evolution. Then, whatever they do, they will feel grace and bliss in every work. Everything they do, right or wrong, is karma, and that karma can be transmuted into karma yoga provided there is enlightenment in them.

Why do we become bored with our work?

It is due to your attitude. If the attitude is correct, you can go on doing the same work for fifty years. When you consider your work as a duty, a way of serving others, it never becomes

dull. It is only when you think of it in terms of your own development or pleasure that work becomes intolerable and monotonous.

It is actually far easier and more motivating to work for others than for yourself. This is the secret of karma yoga which few understand and are able to appreciate. This is the difference between karma and karma yoga. You create karma when you act with yourself in mind, with your personal desires and problems as a motivation. When you act, not for yourself, but as a service, an offering to others, the mind is freed and you experience the benefits of karma yoga.

Karma yoga can be practised anywhere at any time. It is not necessary to live in an ashram to practise it. But few understand the basic principle behind it and the necessity of it being performed with the correct attitude. In the ashram you learn how to practise karma yoga and this is very important. Otherwise you may spend your whole life working for yourself and increasing your suffering, rather than working for others and ending your suffering along with theirs.

So, karma yoga is a necessary part of life. It is as necessary as eating, talking or walking – for you must go on creating karma as long as you are alive. You cannot live without action. Therefore, let your actions be performed as a service to the evolution of all beings and you will enjoy a life of utter freedom, simplicity and bliss. All your needs will be bestowed on you as if blessings from God. You will never be lonely or suffer any ills. When the mind is at peace with itself, the body attains health. People are drawn to such a person like bees to nectar. It is impossible to keep them away.

Self-Respect and Sadhana

I know that it is very hard to understand the role of karma sannyasa in one's life, and much more difficult to put those ideals into daily practice and maintain the natural process of life. Our minds have been structured in such a way that we are not able to integrate the two opposite forces of life together. Either we go by the mundane experiences and live a completely external life, neglecting the spiritual or inner experience altogether; or we rush headlong and neck-deep into the transcendental way of life, neglecting the mundane or empirical experiences.

Examples of these two extremes in life are not difficult to find. On one hand, we have the recluses, the renunciates, who completely deny the empirical side of life. They totally reject that area of life which is related to the senses, the body and the mind. These people only follow the transcendental process of life, a life of rejection and negation. On the other hand, there are worldly people who do not understand or care about the higher and transcendental values of life. What they understand is just the body and the senses and they are absolutely soaked in the sensualities of life. For them, nothing is beyond the body and senses. Total creation and total existence, to them, is what can be perceived by the senses. That is another side of life.

By accepting the initiation and philosophy of karma sannyasa, we are trying to integrate both the internal and

external elements of life because, according to the laws of nature, neither is the empirical, worldly experience untrue, nor is the transcendental experience difficult to attain. As a householder, whatever experiences you are going through, whatever experiences you have already undergone and whatever experiences you will be going through are all a part of your spiritual life, and not detrimental to it. This is what a karma sannyasin has to understand.

There is nothing to give up; there is nothing to reject. As you evolve, many habits, addictions and experiences are left behind. For example, when you grow old, your teeth fall out; it's a natural process. You do not have to extract them one by one to become old. As you grow older, your hair goes grey. In order to become old, you don't have to dye it white. In the same way, what we call the sensualities of life, the infirmities of willpower, the habits, the weaknesses, all these things, will fall away one by one by themselves, without you having to do anything. Even as a snake sheds its skin at the proper time, in the same way, various scales in your human life, concerning your body habits, your sensual and social habits will automatically drop off without your disturbing them or rather, without your disturbing yourself.

A karma sannyasin must have respect for his way of life. It is important to appreciate, accept and understand his own lifestyle. Once, someone went to Winston Churchill and advised him not to smoke cigars. He said, "Why not? It is aromatic, it is refreshing, it gives me pleasure and it stimulates my imagination." The other man said, "But it is bad for the lungs and causes cancer." Churchill replied, "That is all nonsense!" This is the attitude one should have about oneself and one's way of life. "I have bad habits; my mind is very negative; I am a very hopeless person." No! Of course, a karma sannyasin doesn't have to be egoistic, but, at the same time, he doesn't have to suffer from these complexes.

As I have said, you are subjected to the laws of universal or cosmic nature, and according to those laws you have a certain type of personality, a certain way of thinking, a certain kind

of conviction, or a certain type of weakness from time to time. But you should not worry about it or try to get out of it. You should wait. You must have patience. If you have patience, you will find that in the course of time, like a snake, you will throw off those scales automatically. They will eventually drop away because habits and addictions are transitory. All the thoughts that go through your mind are impermanent; they keep moving like a flowing river.

Therefore, a karma sannyasin must respect his own personality in toto. You should never suffer from any complexes of guilt, sin and negativity. You are an integral part of the cosmic drama and, therefore, you are playing your part. I assure you that once you are convinced about your stage in life and have respect for yourself, for your physical body, for your wife, husband and children, state of mind, moral philosophy, ethics and religion, you will find that your spiritual progress will be very fast. But if you suffer from inferiority complexes and low morality and ethics, you will constantly be thinking, "I am not a good person, I am evil minded, I am weak, I am sensual, I am not fit for spiritual life." These kinds of thoughts do not belong, relate or refer to a karma sannyasin.

From today, you must respect yourselves as a whole. Whether you are sensual, anti-sensual, hypo-sensual, it does not matter – accept it! Then, your sadhana, your spiritual practice of kundalini yoga, kriya yoga, hatha yoga, sahaja yoga, nada yoga, mantra yoga, or whatever form of yoga you are doing, will produce astounding results and give you experiences very fast.

Every day without fail, with absolute regularity, you must devote a minimum of ten minutes to your practice, whether you are well or ill, whether or not you have faith, whether or not you understand, whether or not you get results. For ten minutes you must sit calmly and quietly, with your body absolutely still, with your eyes closed, and gaze inward, either at the nosetip, the mid-eyebrow centre, the heart centre or the navel centre. You must fix your inner gaze at one of these

points and practise for ten minutes. You can practise your mantra, meditation on a form or symbol, concentration on your breath or on the light of your mid-eyebrow centre, the lotus in the heart or the lotus in the navel.

Just do it for ten minutes every day. Even if your mind does not cooperate with you for days, weeks or months at a time, even if your mind is constantly restless, still you must continue. Do not complain, “Oh, my mind is not steady; my mind is not tranquil; my mind is not one-pointed.” No! This is the most important part of a karma sannyasin’s initiation into sadhana. If you have time, practise more. Practise yoga postures; practise whatever you like. But remember – regularity is of the greatest importance! If you practise something for six months, then give it up for a few months and start again after six months – that is not called regularity. Whenever you stop your practices, the regularity is broken, the regularity is disturbed. It is not the quantity of the practices, but regularity in the practices which will ultimately give you inner experiences.

Many people begin to develop experiences very fast; they perceive inner forces, lights, sounds, forms, etc. But one thing I want to tell you is this – don’t run after those experiences. Don’t follow them at all; that is the key. If your point of meditation is the mantra Om and you are concentrating only on the sound of Om, Om, Om, or if you are concentrating on the form of Om, then to any light, any energy, any force or anything else that comes, you must say, “No, only Om.” You should not lose touch with the symbol you have chosen for yourself in exchange for any deepening or fantastic experiences. No experience is greater than your own personal symbol. This is one thing which you should understand. Do not wish for experiences. Only one experience is of great importance, the inner experience of your outer symbol. If your outer symbol is fire, a flame of fire, then you should be able to experience the same fire inwardly. External experience of fire or internal experience of fire, subtle experience of fire or astral experience of fire, causal experience of fire or

spiritual experience of fire, but the fire has to be the same. Only the depth of awareness will differ. There will be a difference only in the depth of your awareness, but there will be no difference in the form of your symbol. This is the point which you will have to understand.

Many of us make a simple mistake. We sit for meditation, start chanting Om or something else and suddenly we see lights, forms and landscapes. We go on flowing with those experiences and get lost and ultimately come back to the sensual world. Most people do it because to roam within these experiences is very pleasant. To see the inner light, to see the triangle, to see an angel, to hear music, to see landscapes, forests, oceans, the Himalayas – ah! It is a kind of inner pleasure and that is what everyone will have to avoid, although it is very difficult to do so. Once you start meditation on your mantra or symbol and go into the depths, you will lose it and begin to see things. After some time, you wake up: “Hey, I lost my fire flame and I went somewhere else.”

Do not get lost in your inner world because the field of inner consciousness is infinite; the area, the space of inner consciousness is uncharted and unmapped. There are no directions, no footpaths, not to speak of freeways! You can go in any direction, and every direction will bring another experience. Whichever way you turn your consciousness, whichever way you turn your mind, you will have an experience. That experience leads you away, until you are lost. And finally after a few months or years, you say, “Oh, these experiences mean nothing.”

These are called psychic experiences. Sometimes they give you a little bit of extrasensory perception for a limited period of time, but not for all time. A clairvoyant is clairvoyant for only a short time; you can't be clairvoyant for years and years together. These experiences have a limited time, like a flower which blooms for a few days and then dies. In the same way, these psychic faculties bloom and then die.

Once I practised clairvoyance on a crystal and I could see things in it very clearly, but I can't now because those

faculties bloom like a flower for a few months and then they automatically perish. No experience is imperishable; no experience is immortal. Every experience has a birth and a death. So psychic experiences also have a limited time span. But during meditation, the experience of yourself in the form of Om, in the form of a fire-flame, a triangle or any of the other symbols, must be kept in mind all the time.

So, for all karma sannyasins I have made two things very clear. First, have respect for your lifestyle, your personality; and second, be regular in your sadhana for at least ten minutes every day, at any cost! With this I hope that everything will go well.

Inner Transformation

When you are not content with household life, you want to get out of it so you can be born spiritually. But if you cannot get out of it, the alternative is to live in it with a different awareness and a different philosophy. That is called karma sannyasa.

During household life you are involved in karma and these karmas create more karma. They create samskaras to which you are bound because of *asakti* or involvement. It is possible to associate with your family, your children, your responsibilities and obligations, either with total attachment or with detachment. However, you have only been taught to base your associations on attachment. Nobody has ever shown you how to live with your relatives, discharge your duties, solve your problems and interact with your family members, friends, wealth, money and property with detachment. The art of living a detached life is called karma sannyasa.

Detachment is not something that can be developed just by thinking or through any other intellectual process. Unless you have some experience which changes the quality of your mind, you cannot understand what detachment means. In order to understand anasakti, vairagya, sannyasa or detachment, you need more than just an intellectual process. You must have a different quality of mind, and for that purpose the mind has to be trained and educated. Intellectually you know that nothing belongs to you and that

everything is temporary. You may say it every day, but because there is so much *mamata*, or mineness and attachment, whatever happens to someone else affects you too because you relate yourself to the external happenings.

Once there was a sadhu and a Mussulman living next door to each other. One day the sadhu heard his neighbour crying. He went to the Mussulman and asked, "Why are you crying?" The Mussulman sobbed, "Maharaj, my goat is dead." The sadhu said, "So what? Sooner or later everything must die." He explained that crying would not bring the goat back and he was able to pacify his friend.

After three months, the sadhu's cow died. He became so miserable over this that he did not go out of his kutir for many days. His friend, the Mussulman, wondered what had happened and came to investigate. He entered the sadhu's kutir and found him in a deep depression. He asked, "What has happened to you?" The sadhu replied, "My cow is dead." The Mussulman remembered how he had been consoled by the sadhu's wise words when his goat had died, so he said, "What if your cow is dead? Everything that is born must die." But the sadhu interrupted him, saying, "I don't want to hear your words of wisdom. That was your goat; this is my cow."

You see, this is a very simple thing that we experience every day in our lives. When the sadhu was talking to the mussulman, he had a different quality of intellect which he did not have when his own cow died. In order to practise detachment or *anasakti*, you do not have to abandon karma, the elements or materials. You have only to develop a philosophy and through that philosophy you can have a different relationship with everybody. But to have that philosophy, you must have an experience.

You may read the whole of the *Yoga Vashishtha*, but if an accident takes place in your family, you are definitely going to feel it because the *Yoga Vashishtha* has not brought about a fundamental transformation in the structure of your awareness. It has only enlarged the scope of your intellect. At the most you can say, "Oh, life is temporary," but still,

you will be struck by the disaster. What is required is a transformation in the realm of awareness, *anubhuti* or experience, and that can be brought about by the practise of dhyana, self-introspection, mantra and similar techniques.

Karma sannyasa is very important for every householder. Even if you are not yet able to accept the idea, you can at least practise it for fifteen days every year. What harm is there if you behave like a sannyasin in your family, if not each day of the year, at least for fifteen days? How do you practise it? Sannyasins have a special way of living which was codified in the vedic tradition, regarding eating, sleeping, walking, friendship, attachments, detachments, attending to births, deaths and marriages. If a householder lives the same life for at least fifteen days every year, he will gain an understanding of grihastha ashrama and have a greater vision of the life he is leading.

Most people live the life of a householder, not out of respect or because they think that this life has some sort of dignity, but because they are under some sort of psychological, emotional or social compulsion. If these compulsions were not there, I don't think we would even like to lead this life, which means we do not understand the proper place of grihastha ashrama in our evolution. Is the life of a householder only meant for wasting the mind on sensual objects? Is it not rather a stepping-stone to realization?

When should you take karma sannyasa? At the age of fifty-six when you have your first heart attack, or at seventy when you have been completely squeezed of everything? No, the moment you realize that grihastha ashrama is the means and not the end, and that within the involvement of life you must develop a deeper and higher, more perpetual, enduring and abiding awareness, immediately go out, ask your guru for a geru dhoti, a spiritual name, a philosophy to live by and a goal.

A karma sannyasin has a goal; a householder has none – he is just living. Provident fund, property, wealth, educated children; this cannot be the true goal and final destiny. A

karma sannyasin has one goal and one destination. There cannot be two destinations as far as total cosmic existence is concerned. The destination is only one, and when that goal, your true destination, is given to you by your guru, you are a karma sannyasin.

When you put on the geru dhoti, remember that this colour represents dynamism, not towards external life, but towards your sadhana, your quest into spiritual life. Geru is the colour of vairagya (dispassion and detachment, dhyana (meditation) and anasakti (process of detachment), but it does not represent passive psychology. It symbolizes your dynamic approach to your goal. You must have two geru dhotis, and when you return from the office or factory, put away your dress or coat and trousers and put on your geru.

If you can't do this, I have another suggestion. Go to any ashram, not with your family, but alone. Shave your head completely, put on geru, sleep on the floor, eat only once a day, practise complete brahmacharya in thought, word and deed, and live like a poorna sannyasin (full renunciate), no smoking, no transistor radio, no newspaper, no politics, no business, no market; just one thing – your sadhana. Your guru will tell you what to do – japa, likhit japa, reading the *Yoga Vashishtha* or *Bhagavad Gita*, or asana practice. If he doesn't tell you anything, just work in his kitchen or garden. Even if you only live the life of a sannyasin for fifteen days, it will enrich you with very deep and abiding experiences, and it will create a new type of mind, personality and man or woman. Then, when you return to the house, you will see things with different eyes. There may be births, deaths, marriages, conflicts and quarrels, but you will be able to attend to them as a different person. What I want is that seekers accept this role. You do not have to wear geru to the office; it is not necessary. When you are a karma sannyasin, you must play the role of a perfect householder and a part-time sannyasin.

A philosophy is necessary, a goal is necessary, and two geru dhotis are a must. You must also have a spiritual name,

because the name your parents have given you relates to your body and religion or race, but your name should be related to your atman. My name is Swami Satyananda, and the day I took this name, my destiny changed. All that was written in my astrological charts has not come true, not because the astrologer was wrong, but because my whole destiny changed.

The moment you begin to assert your spiritual willpower, or the moment you begin to change to a new way of thinking, your destiny begins to change also. Karma sannyasa must become the order of the day, and vanaprastha ashrama should be revived. Don't wait until you turn fifty years of age. Even while you are married in grihastha ashrama, you can be a karma sannyasin.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Please tell us the significance of having a spiritual name and what it does for spiritual growth?

Many people have very funny names. Years ago, there was a police officer who was a friend of my father's. His name was Mr Brickfield and he had a friend whose name was Mr Fox. The names which are given to us these days have no bearing on our personality. They do not indicate anything that we are. They are given to us simply to identify each other by. The name which is given to you should represent your spiritual personality.

Since ancient times in India, and still today, there was a system by which the child's horoscope was cast at the time of birth. The zodiac sign, the ascendant and many other subtler points were noted. Then his place was fixed somewhere in the cosmos. Accordingly, on a certain day (say the ninth day) the first syllable of his personality was declared. Then it was up to the parents to find a name for him. Gradually, however, this system began to decline. The science remained, but people began to give religious names or national names without first consulting the child's horoscope. Now, although

the system still remains, they don't really utilize it properly in order to give the right name. That is the first point.

Secondly, a change of name has a definite effect on one's destiny, because a name possesses a particular vibration, and when it is changed, the vibrations are reorganized and rearranged, as far as the individual is concerned. If it is properly chosen, this new name is bound to create a new system of vibration, which will affect the karmas positively. The name which belongs to you, which is your real nature, indicates your destiny.

There are so many people throughout the world and each one is different from the other. No two beings are alike. We are slightly different, and our personality is to be decided on the basis of our karma. What our karmas are, that is our personality. By personality I don't mean the physical body and its colour, the nationality, intellect or emotions. Personality is what our karmas are.

Supposing there are five people sitting in one place and they are all white or black or coloured. All are the same age, twenty-five. One is a thief, another a saint, the third a politician, the fourth an idiot and the fifth a compassionate person. Their external colour, religion, nationality and age are more or less the same. They come from the same village, but their natures are different. If the thief finds that you have left your bag outside, he will just pick it up and run away. The idiot will look at it, but he will not know what to do with it. A saint will wait there and when you come out, he will say, "Is this your bag? Take it and see if everything is okay."

So these five persons have five different natures and, according to these natures, they must have names. The first person's name should be Mr Thief, the second, Mr Swami, the third, Mr Politician, the fourth, Mr Idiot and the fifth, Mr Charity. This is how the names should be discovered and given, according to the potential nature of the person, and that is why I have been trying to give proper names to people.

Now here is an example. One of my swamis is called Nadamurti – the symbol of sound. You see everybody has a

name according to his external and internal nature. *Nada* means 'inner sound'. Laughter is an external sound, and when Nadamurti laughs you can always hear him. But at the same time, the inner sound is there. Therefore, his sadhana should be nada yoga because, according to his karma, his sadhana, his nature and the reorganization of the different atoms and molecules in his body and mind, it is the sound which he can realize more easily than the form. The inner spiritual experience can be experienced in the form of light, in the form of sound, in the form of a mandala, etc., and for him it is the form of sound.

What is the significance of the geru cloth; as a householder, can I also wear it?

When you enter the army, do you wear your blue jeans? No, you have to put on a uniform. When you wear that uniform and those epaulettes and when your boots strike against the ground and you salute, you feel, now I can go to war. The uniform gives you strength and boosts your inner morale. When you go to a law court, you see how the judges dress in black gowns and wigs.

Every dress has its own significance. For spiritually minded people who want to create a conducive environment within and without, who want to feel differently about themselves, at least for some time, and who want to benefit from the special vibrations of the geru colour, for them this cloth represents a replica of dynamic, spiritual awareness.

So, whether you are a householder or a sannyasin, when you are practising yoga you should put on geru, whether it is pyjamas, trousers or a dhoti. Cover yourself with this geru cloth and see if you feel different, if you feel better or not. Geru has its own chemical properties which are very important for a sannyasin, but here we are concerned about the vibrations, the atmosphere and the significance of the geru for those people who are not sannyasins.

Centres of Knowledge and Light

In India we have many ashrams. They are places where people can come to live for some time and practise spiritual introspection. In these ashrams, yoga is the nucleus. But yoga is not an exclusive technique for Indians; yoga is the whole of life. These various ashrams are structured differently. Some teach hatha yoga and others Vedanta, some follow tantric worship and there are ashrams where religious worship and scriptural reading are conducted.

An ashram is not just an external structure; there has to be a spirit in it. A temple without spirit, a church without spirit, an ashram without spirit, or a body without spirit, is nonsense. Spirit is symbolized by light because we need it. In the darkness of night, when you want to go out you take a torch with you and if you don't have torchlight, you will stumble. You may even fall down and break your bones.

In the same way, there are various levels of experience where we need the light and everywhere there is darkness. We are not able to see within our own selves. Our minds, thoughts, emotions, ambitions – everything is moving in the realm of darkness. By chance we sometimes experience happiness, but in fact we do not deserve it; it comes to us by mistake. As human beings travelling within spiritual darkness, we feel happy sometimes, but only by chance. Therefore, you have to understand that the essence of light has to be brought in.

In an ashram also there has to be light and the person looking after it has to be a light, so that in the course of time he can fill the hearts of his pupils and disciples with inner awareness. Light and inner awareness mean the same thing. When the inner awareness grows in the mind, intellect and heart of the disciple or pupil, then and only then has he been given the light. When this inner awareness grows within, gradually inner happiness and understanding increase and things begin to change. That is why, when we open an ashram, we inaugurate it with the kindling of light.

The scheme of ashram life was planned long, long ago. Its purpose was not merely to provide a retreat, not only to supply a little bit of relaxation from day to day tensions, not just to give a spiritual glimpse into one's daily practice. The very purpose of ashram life was to create an environment where everybody lived and worked together.

In the most ancient Veda, the *Rig Veda*, there is a mantra which translated means, "Let us go together, speak together, sing together . . ." That was the spirit behind ashram life. In different periods, the structure of ashrams did vary, but the spirit remained the same, with everybody going to bed at night and getting up in the morning at the same time. Whether working in the kitchen, the garden and fields, the cowshed or anywhere else in the ashram, everybody worked as a community with team spirit.

It is believed by people today that spiritual enlightenment can take place only through meditation, but it is not an absolutely correct concept. Spiritual illumination comes side by side with physical work called karma yoga. When you live with your family you do karma and not karma yoga, but when you practise karma yoga and meditation, then spiritual enlightenment comes quickly. Therefore, all over the world, once upon a time, this culture was very prominent. Householders took a little time off from their hectic activities and went to live in the ashram for a short period, working there just like ashramites and coming back with a new realization and understanding of life. This helped them to

have better relationships with their family members and also gave them an opportunity to assess their way of life.

Millions and millions of people are striving for samadhi, but only a few hundred are able to walk forward. Out of those few hundred, only a selected few are able to reach the ultimate – that great illumination! Man is destined and born for it and that is the basic difference between human and animal incarnation. So far as food, sleep, fear and sexual actions are concerned, they are common to humans and animals alike. Then where is the difference? There is only one difference; man lives for illumination; he works for it.

In the path of yoga, what is the way to work and what is the purpose of work, both in your family and in the ashram? Why do swamis work in the ashram and how do they work; why do you work and how do you work? The secret is detachment; you have to work with detachment, and for what? For money? Of course, it comes; if you are a plumber, electrician or driver, you get so much money per hour or per day, but that is different. Why do you work in yogic life?

A yogi or sannyasin works for the purification of the awareness. There is dross over your mind and you have to clean it, but it cannot be cleaned unless you involve yourself in karma, action. It cannot be done! Therefore, a yogi, a sannyasin or highly evolved person works with detachment, towards the purification of the self. Detachment is not renunciation – remember it. If you kick your job and go away, that is renunciation. If you leave your wife or husband and just run away, that is not detachment; that is renunciation. It is not renunciation I am talking about.

I am not talking about renouncing anything, leaving anything, abandoning anything. I am talking about living with the things of life, with people, without attachment. When I use the word detachment, I don't mean lack of love. You can love with detachment. Love with detachment gives you total satisfaction, perennial and enduring satisfaction – no frustration. Love with attachment can give you happiness sometimes and sometimes unhappiness.

I am not talking about renunciation when I use the word detachment. It is a philosophy, a way of thinking, and it is a level of understanding also. When this level of understanding comes to you, then you should build an ashram. Before that you should not, otherwise you are only building an ashram instead of a house and thus replacing the superimposed position of your attachment.

Ashram life is an aid to illumination. This life is designed in such a way that it reminds you of illumination at every moment. In an ashram you do not meditate all day. You see the glory of divinity while you graze the cows, work as a carpenter, cut and boil the vegetables in the kitchen, look after the bank accounts, cash and cheques, see to the cleaning of the premises and take care of the sick, from dawn to dusk. When the sun rises, you can see the ashram humming with activity just like a beehive, and when the sun sets, it is still very active.

The members of the ashram live a very simple life and the guests or visitors who come from outside are also obliged to live that life. This simplicity of life is a type of penance. Therefore, as far as I have seen in other ashrams and as far as my own ashrams are concerned, I have just one objective in mind – to keep alive an atmosphere which will accelerate the pace of evolution in spiritual life.

An ashram should become an ideal centre of knowledge and light. People from many parts of the country should be able to go there from time to time and give their share of creative work. Seminars and classes should be conducted and yoga teachers sent to different parts of the province or state. It is such important work in our time! When leaders are thinking about survival, we are thinking about how we can attain inner knowledge, higher awareness.

Many swamis have dedicated their lives to the dissemination of yoga and, in the course of time, we are going to have many karma sannyasins. Please do not misunderstand me. I am talking about karma sannyasins, not sannyasins. We are going to have many because we are ready for them; not

those who have renounced, but those who are living with detachment. When householders, men and women, live a practical life, facing it together while sharing the happiness, unhappiness and joy with detachment, that is called karma sannyasa, and those karma sannyasins will be able to help their own people and humanity more and more in the years to come.

Society has to produce noble leaders for itself. There must be such leaders in the administration of a country. There are leaders of defence projects, but there have to be leaders who can guide humanity and lead it spiritually. Therefore, in this respect, I definitely think that the ashrams can develop into powerhouses of spiritual regeneration for the whole of society.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Can you tell me more about what the ashram is and what it can offer me?

Ashram life is a most ancient tradition. An ashram is a place where you can expose your personality to utter simplicity. There are many places in the Western world, in Australia, and even in India that are known as ashrams, but they are not true ashrams. An ashram offers a simple life where you can expose yourself to the best possible extent. It is a place where you make spiritual and physical effort, where you live with a lot of people, sharing everything with them, knowing each other and trying to understand that you are not the only sufferer in this great world. This is called an ashram. Everybody is toiling more or less on the same lines and we are co-travellers along the way, although we never knew each other before.

The atmosphere of the ashram is charged with spiritual vibrations created by the system, discipline, good thoughts and spirituality of the people who live in the ashram and who visit the ashram from time to time. Therefore, in the ashram we try to live in a way which contributes to the peaceful

atmosphere of the ashram. There should be regular classes in yoga, meditation, relaxation, kirtan, and a free atmosphere. Then the ashram life improves your spiritual destiny and your spiritual personality.

In India we have many ashrams in calm and quiet places, like Rishikesh, where people come from every part of the country and spend some time with their guru or with their fellow men. There they make themselves completely free from the type of life they have been leading so far. The diet and the way of living is changed. You can't expect, and you shouldn't expect, the same comforts and luxuries which you have at home. A change in life by living in an ashram environment is better.

About two years ago, some people came to me. They wanted to build an ashram in Australia. I said, "It's a good idea, have about twenty or thirty acres of land." They said, "But we want to have a little more comfort there." They wanted comforts like hot water, separate rooms, television and so on. I told them, "If you are going to make an ashram like a motel, then you had better call it 'Satyananda Motel'; don't call it an ashram, because in an ashram, the richest and the poorest must throw away those distinctions which they have superimposed on themselves. You can have a motel with a bathtub, a mirror, individual television sets and a fridge with a few bottles inside. Then more people will come and none will go and none will grow."

When you come to an ashram, as long as you are there spend your time in practices, and if you have some time left, then work in the garden with the swamis. Try to do some sort of selfless service. It will give you peace of mind. Then, when you go back, try to take the ashram with you into your lifestyle. Even if you are not able to create a prototype ashram there, you can take a few important items home. Every household can learn a little from ashram life. If the simplicity and the serene atmosphere of the ashram can be taken back with you, I think your home can also become a mini ashram and you will be the guru there.

What is the best way for a householder devotee who cannot always come to the ashram to help with your mission?

To those who want to help humanity and help my mission, I have just one thing to say – practise yoga! You may call it my mission, you may call it anything, but yoga alone is not my purpose. I am not a missionary. If a doctor prescribes medicine for his patient, what exactly is he doing? Is he selling medicine or is he trying to help the patient? What should his mission be, to sell medicine or to help the patient?

I am teaching yoga, I am preaching yoga, I am instructing yoga, because I have found that yoga has an answer for all of man's difficulties. If one day I were to realize that yoga was not the answer to man's problems, I would stop teaching it because yoga is not my religion, nor am I a fanatic. The institution is not my aim, it is my base; yoga is not my aim, it is my base.

The evolution of humanity, man's spiritual life, his spiritual destiny – that is the purpose! Yoga is not the purpose. If you can realize this, then wherever you are, you can help with the work. I have often found that when people begin to teach yoga, they become fanatical about it and think that it is only yoga which is important. So, we must always remember that yoga is a means, not an end. I am not just teaching yoga. I am teaching yoga for the spiritual, mental and physical health of mankind, not yoga for the sake of yoga.

If yoga becomes the purpose of the mission, the disciples will become fanatical, as has happened in every religion, and then yoga will also become a religion. When a philosophy is overemphasized, it becomes the end and not the means, and then that philosophy becomes a religion. That is how religions have come about. Even if they are not able to help humanity today, even if they have caused massacres and genocide throughout the world, still religions survive, because religions are an end in themselves.

However, if the purpose of religion or yoga or anything is to give a path to higher evolution, a higher destiny to mankind, then the moment we see that it has failed we

should stop it, destroy it, but we haven't done this. In the last few thousand years, what has religion done to you? You know very well. What is religion doing today? But still we keep quiet because for us religion is the mission, it is the end, it is not the means. I am not going to do that with yoga, otherwise yoga will become another tool of genocide. "Practise yoga or I'll kill you."

We have to remember one thing today. The maladies, difficulties and distress which mankind is facing throughout the world are spiritual in nature. That is why medical science has almost failed; that is why psychology has almost failed; that is why technological wealth and prosperity have almost failed. That is why most civilized, organized, disciplined and political orders have almost failed, because the malady that man is suffering from today is spiritual. It is related to the quality of his mind; it is related to the quality of his soul; it is related to the quality of his philosophy. Therefore, if yoga can be brought into the picture, it will save a lot of distress to mankind.

That is why I am preaching yoga. You are a householder with your own responsibilities. Improve the quality of your awareness, but side by side you can practise yoga, evolve your consciousness, improve the quality of your awareness and realize that you are not the body, but something more than that. If you can do this, then you are serving my mission.

By what means can I receive your guidance when you are far away, without the danger of my mind interfering?

When you want to tune your transistor to a radio station, what do you do? Switch on, adjust the tuning and make sure that you have a working battery.

As far as I know, there are two ways of having communication with the guru. First of all, guru is inside. We are all linked with each other by a very great field which is called the energy field. We are not separate – five thousand heads, twenty thousand hands, thirty thousand bodies, fifty thousand bodies, men, women, children, animals and plants.

We are all interrelated but we don't know it because we can only see the body; we can't see the energy field. We are told that there is an energy field, in the same way as there are radioactive and electromagnetic fields; you have them but you don't see them.

Scientists tell us that we are all interlinked and each and every body is a microcosmic unit of the macrocosmos. What exists in the cosmos exists in you and in me too. It is not just an idea, it is not just a philosophy, but the latest theory in science. The latest discoveries in science have proved this very well. I don't want to go into detail as to how an atom contains the entire cosmos, mathematically and accurately. That is for you to ask your physics teachers.

I am a microcosmic unit of the macrocosmos and every one of you is too. That means you contain what the cosmos contains. As such, your guru is in you also. I am the guru outside for some people, but I am in them too, and when they are trying to communicate with me, they are trying to communicate with me through themselves because I am with them. They don't have to span distances, although distances are relative. What you call five thousand miles or twenty thousand kilometres may be just nothing.

As you know in theory, distances are absolutely relative. At one point there is a distance between you and me of five thousand kilometres, but when you change the realm of your consciousness, there is no distance. Distances are not the same in every realm of consciousness. As you change the level of your consciousness, as you change the level of your awareness, the distances change. What is ten thousand kilometres in this level of consciousness may be just one centimetre in a heightened level of consciousness. Fifty thousand miles in this level of consciousness is not fifty thousand miles in the other levels of consciousness. Therefore, we don't talk about distances in deep meditation, especially when you have tuned your radio to zero meter.

What is zero meter? Zero meter means *shoonyata*. *Shoonyata* means voidness, no thinking by force for some

time. This is a negative method. A thought comes to you and you say, "No." Another thought comes and you say, "No." You try not to pay any attention to any of the thoughts, but just disperse them. By practising this, within a short time you will develop shoonyata, voidness, and when that voidness comes, a link is automatically established between you and the guru. That is one way.

The other way is a positive one. That is the path of bhakti yoga, the path of extreme devotion, the path of extreme divine love. When your mind is completely devoted to your guru and for you he means not only something but everything, then the link is very easy; even with your eyes open you can maintain a link with him.

Stages of Sannyasa

When you develop the idea of non-involvement, but still stay at home with the family, that is grihastha sannyasa. It is a preparation for sannyasa. When you are reassessing your sense of values, reflecting over the philosophy of life and thinking of the real destination that man is born to achieve, then you are ready for household sannyasa. In other words, while discharging your duties as a householder, husband, wife, father, mother, son or daughter, you become aware of the futility of this mad world and begin to think about who you are and what you have incarnated for. That is the correct and most conducive time for entering grihastha or karma sannyasa.

As a householder, you are obliged to perform all the rituals of household life, but as a karma sannyasin, you have to understand the purpose of life and gradually prepare yourself for total sannyasa. Householder sannyasa is not well known to people yet, but many know something about it. They live for some time in an ashram, take a spiritual name, a mantra and adopt the ashram dress. When they return to their homes, they live with their wife, husband, children and family, as they did before, but with discipline, control, social and spiritual awareness, and they live a very systematic life.

The wild life, in which we load ourselves up with sensory experiences, brings us nearer to disease, decay and death until one fine day we realize that after eighty years of life, we

have gained nothing and lost all the opportunities. That is a period of remorse and sorrow. When one begins to think about life, one should go to one's guru and get initiated into this idea – the rethinking process.

In order to improve the quality of life, there is another sannyasa called temporary sannyasa. Although it is meant for everybody, it should be taken when you are young. It means that you go to an ashram and live there for a minimum period of fifteen days as a sannyasin. You can decide the maximum period for yourself according to your situation; it can be for one year also. Whether male or female, you live in an ashram for this period, not as a seeker, household visitor or yoga student, but as a sannyasin.

Whatever the rules of sannyasa are, you should adopt all of them. The rules are: a simple life, minimum possessions or dependence on comfort and convenience, simple food without worrying about protein, carbohydrates, vitamins, iron and calcium. Eat to live, not live to eat. If the time is right and it does not interfere with your household duties, financial status or employment, you can stay for one, two or three years.

Ashram life should always be very simple. There are ashrams nowadays that are as comfortable as your flat, or maybe even more so, but this is not what an ashram is meant for. If ashrams provide you with the facilities and comforts of a four or five star hotel, then they are not ashrams. In the home you may have everything, but when you go to the ashram you must find a total change. You must get an emotional shock. At home you sleep on a Dunlop mattress, but at the ashram you have wood. At home you eat three and four course meals, but in the ashram you get it all at one serving and there is only one item, called khichari.

When you are purified, when conflicts are no more, then your body can produce all the necessary vitamins. I am talking science, not ideology; the body has everything within itself. The body can produce all the minerals, vitamins and protein which you can get through fruit, meat, eggs,

dairy products and even fat. It has the capacity to produce everything in itself, but it does not because you never give it a chance. If you load your body with fats, meat and all these vitamins, it will say, “Okay sir, you are already introducing all these things, so why should I try to produce them?” All the necessary enzymes and nutrition required for life are already in the body, but we do not use them.

That is the second stage of sannyasa, which in my opinion should be experienced by everyone. I think that all the millions of people throughout the world should have an experience of sannyasa for at least fifteen days. Live a simple life in the ashram, eating once or twice daily, just to live; no idea of the world, no transistor, TV, newspapers, novels; no cream, powder, soap; no fear, anxiety, passion.

Sit down if you want to and read the *Gita*, the Bible, the Koran. If you do not want to read, you can write *likhit japa*. Just experience this one-pointed mind for fifteen days. But you must shave your head and don the *geru* – that is important! After fifteen days, come out. Withdraw your cashbook, chequebook, traveller’s cheques and suitcase, put on fancy dress and go back to your home and job. This taste of the concept of sannyasa for self-development will give you a new strategy to face the challenges of life.

The third stage of sannyasa is when you totally renounce everything and dedicate yourself fully to spiritual life – the last and final stage. So everyone must definitely take one of these stages of sannyasa, not compulsorily but voluntarily, depending on the quality and process of their awareness.

Sannyasa and Karma Sannyasa

In ancient times, the order of sannyasa was organized to create facilities for sincere aspirants to follow the path of enlightenment and realize the spirit. Our ancestors knew very well that everybody can realize the highest consciousness because the self or the atman is present in every being. It is closer than your own breath; it is much closer than your own prana. That is the closest substance in every being and, therefore, everybody can have the experience of spiritual enlightenment.

However, they found that the environment in which one lives and the society to which one belongs is never conducive to spiritual illumination. Even the societies which were primarily created to organize the facility for spiritual enlightenment became confused and complicated in the course of time. The social structure in which we live often becomes an absolute barrier in the process of evolution of the mind and spirit. The obligations, the natural duties, the relationships and the emotional structure in general are so complicated and we are so involved in them that even though we sincerely aspire for spiritual experience, we cannot have that on account of the things which are around us.

Therefore, our ancestors decided to create an order which would be free of all social encumbrances. That is what they did, and that order was known as sannyasa. A sannyasin is not obliged to attend, answer or respond to social duties. He is

not obliged to join a funeral procession or attend a marriage party. There are many other events which a sannyasin is not at all obliged to participate in. He need not attend to those things. That makes the transition to spiritual life easier.

However, it is not possible for everybody to be initiated into this order of sannyasa, so another order was created, preparatory to sannyasa. In the twentieth century we call it karma sannyasa, but earlier it was known as vanaprastha sannyasa. As a karma sannyasin you are allowed to live with your wife or husband and attend to the most important and necessary obligations of the family, but at the same time, you are not bothered by other obligations and complications. You can guide the affairs of the family. You can give right and just direction, but as you are dedicated to spiritual aspirations, you are kept free.

Sannyasa is total dedication; nothing to do with the family, children, personal prosperity and similar things. The sannyasin has to leave the family environment and live with the guru for at least twelve years. After that, he has to move as a mendicant for another twelve years. Finally, he sits down for introspection, self-analysis and discovery of the way which he will find for himself as well as for others. After that, he may adopt any way of life. He may open an ashram, live in a solitary place or still keep on wandering hither and thither.

Nowadays, it is very difficult to fulfil the conditions of sannyasa. The aspiration is there, but the background and social training are not adequate, and if we wait sixty or seventy years, until our family obligations are well attended and fulfilled, it is already too late. We become very old, sometimes invalids and physically emaciated. We cannot expect such people to fulfil the conditions of sannyasa. Therefore, it becomes necessary to develop that spirit even while you are a householder, even while you are discharging social responsibilities and fulfilling personal desires and ambitions.

The karma sannyasin is not a perfect sannyasin, but he is a sincere aspirant, and in the course of time we can expect that his consciousness and his perceptions will be transformed

by the practice of sadhana. Even though he may not have the necessary quality of mind, he will have to fix up some sort of discipline for himself. Often we have come across a karma sannyasin and we feel it would have been much better if he had remained an ordinary householder, because a householder is allowed to involve himself in the fulfilment of desires and thus exhaust the stock of karma.

When you realize that desires can never be fulfilled, all forms of attachment are self-styled and the reactions to the effects of life are greatly exaggerated by your mind, then you come to a point of equipoise and introspection. You design for yourself a system of sadhana, a practical way, a system of behaviour, a system of social perception, a definite philosophy of the relationship between you and the things around you.

You cannot just go on relating yourselves to people and life in any manner you like, whether the relationship brings unhappiness or gloom and disappointment. You have to be careful that your relationship with the events, people and objects around you is well selected, well chosen, and that the selection is based on the logic of wisdom. Through wisdom, you have to choose how you should react and how you should feel.

It is also important for you to understand and realize the limitations of your relationship with the pleasures of the senses. It is true that sensual pleasures are compulsions; you cannot escape them, even if you want to. If you try to deny the senses, they will chase you in thought, in fantasy, in dreams and in your indirect psychological behaviour. But after proper analysis and introspection, it is possible for one to limit one's relationship with the objects of sensual pleasure. That is one important aspect of karma sannyasa.

There are many thousands of karma sannyasins in this world. They are aspiring to achieve higher experience, but at the same time they have confirmed trouble on the inner plane. Whenever they want to sit for kriyas, to go deep in meditation or to introspect on the nature of reality as against

appearance, they are confronted by those forms of experience which mutilate the vision of the truth.

I can give you an example of a sincere aspirant, a karma sannyasin, who is not able to understand the necessity of limiting his relationship with the sense objects. He is careless about this aspect of life and philosophy. He thinks that because he is a karma sannyasin it does not matter about his associations, his relationships and the extent of his involvement with the sensual pleasures. He is also not careful about how he reacts to things.

He sits for meditation. He is a strong man, a man of willpower; let us say. In deep meditation he comes to a point of fusion of consciousness into spirit, and just before that all that is lurking in his mind, all that is imbedded in his subconscious plane, comes before him in the form of fear, in the form of unconsciousness, in the form of mutilated spiritual experiences, in the form of what I call psychic visions, and he is not able to go beyond that.

He is able to reach a certain point because he is strong. He is able to control the mind by the practise of raja yoga, bhakti yoga, pranayama, or maybe even by drugs, but when he reaches the borderline, he finds monsters in symbolic form. So, he has to come back because he has not disciplined himself; he has not been able to relegate the fears of his mind. Therefore, a karma sannyasin has to be more careful than an absolute sannyasin.

A total sannyasin lives in a space which is clean within himself. There are certain self-styled notions and beliefs which do not exist in the life of a full sannyasin, because by living that life for a period of time he becomes free of these addictions. A karma sannyasin, on the other hand, has to exert much effort. The sadhana which you choose for yourself should be in accordance with the nature of your evolution. Although you are sixty, you may still be a block-headed person, whereas a child of six may be very intuitive, very intelligent and very evolved. Incarnation after incarnation, life after life, the spirit, mind and matter evolve and become

pure. Get rid of the old rudimentary substance and then that person has the animation of spiritual experience.

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna explains to Arjuna about sannyasa, karma sannyasa, karma yoga and other forms of yoga. While he is dealing with the topic of karma yoga, he says there are two ways. One is the path of total renunciation, where you do not depend on the karma or on the effects of karma. The other is the path of karma, the path of fulfilment. Through the path of karma yoga you reach the same destination which you reach through Samkhya yoga or sannyasa yoga. But in the path of a householder it is necessary to understand the relationships, so that karma yoga becomes a tool for higher realization. Then comes karma sannyasa.

Some people say that one should renounce the actions themselves. How is it possible for one to renounce karma? Karmas do not only belong to the realm of the body. They also belong to the realm of the mind, to the realm of desires, and even if you completely abstain from doing karma, you cannot stop thinking. There is not a moment in life when you can become free from action. There is not a moment when you can follow the path of inactivity and inaction. You may not move, you may not talk, you may not participate in family affairs, but still you are thinking. And what about the involuntary actions, the processes of digestion, assimilation, etc.? So, let us forget for the time being that man can renounce karma. There is no philosophy as such. Neither can you renounce karma nor will karma spare you – that is the fact! If this is the fact, then karma sannyasa should not mean renunciation of noble acts.

In the eighteenth chapter of the *Gita*, it is clearly indicated that charity, compassion, self-purification, the acts that are of this nature, should never be renounced. Here the renunciation of negative karma, of lower passions, is indicated; this is karma sannyasa. In sannyasa, one has to transcend the three realms of prakriti or nature. The three realms of prakriti are tamoguna, rajoguna, and sattoguna. These are the three realms of nature which are subject to the

processes of evolution, and a sannyasin must live beyond the three gunas.

In the *Bhagavad Gita* it says clearly, “He who does not rejoice in happiness; he who does not experience gloom in unhappiness; he who is not affected by profit and loss, praise and criticism, comfort or discomfort, gain or loss, that man is an eternal and absolute sannyasin.” The external factors of life do not touch him at all. Whether he lives in the company of wise men, endowed with knowledge and humility, or he lives with animals who are guided by instinct, or with the lowliest people, like debauched criminals and murderers; such a person, having equal vision in every aspect and circumstance of life, is a sannyasin.

A sannyasin is not supposed to operate on the basis of duality and therefore this is a very difficult path to tread. Unless you are fortunate enough to live with a guru who is himself enlightened about the empirical and transcendental nature of life, and unless you are endowed with good karma from your previous incarnation and good inheritance from your parents, it is hard to survive as a sannyasin.

In India, and of course, everywhere in the world, it is known that a ‘real’ sannyasin is a veritable moving God upon the face of the earth. The type of sannyasin I am indicating now, wherever he moves becomes a holy place, whatever he utters becomes the scriptures and whomsoever he touches or talks to becomes blessed. So, let us say that sannyasa is definitely one of the highest accomplishments and achievements, or rather benedictions, and every karma sannyasin or householder must aspire to display those nobilities in life.

Karma sannyasa is a preparation for full sannyasa and householder life is a preparation for karma sannyasa. Brahmacharya is a preparation for grihastha or householder life. As a brahmachari, you dedicate yourself to education, development of intellect and emotion. As a householder, you fulfil your karma and realize the true nature of every desire, passion, ambition, jealousy, greed, like, dislike, ignorance, pride, etc. They come up like mushrooms, like

the wild grass, and every now and then you weed them out. And in the course of time, you know how to deal with these expressions of lower life.

Instinct follows man life after life, up to an ultimate point, and this instinct must be properly planned, adjusted, utilized, pruned and modified. That can be done when you are a householder, facing life. You should not be proud of that, of course. You are coming to know about life; you are not blind to it, but at the same time you cannot maintain an ignorant, careless attitude to what is happening.

Desires need not be suppressed. At the same time, you should not lay your head before them. They have to be analyzed, understood and sublimated. When the desires are understood, analyzed and sublimated, then transform them into sankalpa. When a person with intense passions is able to sublimate them, he becomes a person with sankalpa. Sankalpa means powerful thinking, creative thinking, invincible processes of thinking. What you think comes true.

As a householder, every moment of your life is a moment of experience, where you realize the empirical nature of your mind, and gradually make the transition onto a higher plane. At that time, you must decide to take karma sannyasa.

Appendices

The Yoga of Renunciation in Action

(Fifth Chapter of the Bhagavad Gita)

Translation by Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh

Arjuna said:

1. Renunciation of actions, O Krishna, Thou praisest, and again (karma) yoga. Tell me conclusively that which is better of the two.

The Blessed Lord said:

2. Renunciation and the yoga of action both lead to the highest bliss, but of the two, the yoga of action is superior to the renunciation of action.
3. He should be known as a perpetual sannyasin who neither hates nor desires, for, free from the pairs of opposites, O mighty-armed Arjuna, he is easily set free from bondage.
4. Children, not the wise, speak of knowledge and the yoga of action or the performance of action as though they are distinct and different; he who is truly established in one obtains the fruits of both.
5. That place which is reached by the samkhyas or the jnanis is reached by the yogis (karma yogis). He sees, who sees knowledge and the performance of action (karma yoga) are one.
6. But renunciation, O mighty-armed Arjuna, is hard to attain without yoga; the yoga-harmonized sage quickly goes to Brahman.

7. He who is devoted to the path of action, whose mind is quite pure, who has conquered the self, who has subdued his senses and who realizes his Self as the Self in all beings, though acting, is not tainted.
8. "I do nothing at all," thus would the harmonized knower of truth think – seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, eating, going, sleeping, breathing.
9. Speaking, letting go, seizing, opening and closing the eyes – convinced that the senses move among the sense objects.
10. He who does actions, offering them to Brahman, and abandoning attachment, is not tainted by sin, just as a lotus leaf is not tainted by water.
11. Yogis, having abandoned attachment, perform actions only by the body, mind, intellect and even by the senses, for the purification of the self.
12. The united one (the well poised or the harmonized) having abandoned the fruit of action attains to the eternal peace; the ununited one (the unsteady or the unbalanced) impelled by desire, attached to the fruit, is bound.
13. Mentally renouncing all actions and self-controlled, the embodied one rests happily in the nine-gated city, neither acting nor causing others (body and senses) to act.
14. Neither agency nor actions does the Lord create for the world, nor union with the fruits of actions. But it is Nature that acts.
15. The Lord takes neither the demerit nor even the merit of any; knowledge is enveloped by ignorance, thereby beings are deluded.
16. But to those whose ignorance is destroyed by the knowledge of the Self, like the sun, knowledge reveals the Supreme (Brahman).

17. Their intellect absorbed in That, their self being That, established in That, with That for their supreme goal, they go whence there is no return, their sins dispelled by knowledge.
18. Sages look with an equal eye on a Brahmana endowed with learning and humility, on a cow, on an elephant, and even on a dog and an outcaste.
19. Even here (in this world) birth (everything) is overcome by those whose minds rest in equality; Brahman is spotless indeed and equal; therefore they are established in Brahman.
20. Resting in Brahman, with steady intellect and undeluded, the knower of Brahman neither rejoiceth on obtaining what is pleasant nor grieveth on obtaining what is unpleasant.
21. With the self unattached to external contacts he finds happiness in the Self; with the self engaged in the meditation of Brahman he attains to the endless happiness.
22. The enjoyments that are born of contacts are only generators of pain, for they have a beginning and an end, O Arjuna: the wise man does not rejoice in them.
23. He who is able, while still here (in this world) to withstand, before the liberation from the body, the impulse born out of desire and anger – he is a yogi, he is a happy man.
24. He who is happy within, who rejoices within, and who is illuminated within, that yogi attains absolute freedom or moksha, himself becoming Brahman.
25. The sages (rishis) obtain absolute freedom or moksha – they whose sins have been destroyed, whose dualities (perception of dualities or experience of the pairs of opposites) are torn asunder, who are self-controlled, and intent on the welfare of all beings.

26. Absolute freedom (or Brahmic bliss) exists on all sides for those self-controlled ascetics who are free from desire and anger, who have controlled their thoughts and who have realized the Self.
27. Shutting out (all) external contacts and fixing the gaze between the eyebrows, equalizing the outgoing and incoming breaths moving within the nostrils.
28. With the senses, the mind and the intellect (ever) controlled, having liberation as his supreme goal, free from desire, fear and anger – the sage is verily liberated forever.
29. He who knows Me as the enjoyer of sacrifices and austerities, the great Lord of all the worlds and the friend of all beings, attains to peace.

Thus in the Upanishads of the glorious *Bhagavad Gita*, the science of the Eternal, the scripture of yoga, the dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna, ends the fifth discourse entitled: 'The Yoga of Renunciation in Action'.

Yajnavalkya-Maitreyi Dialogue

In the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (4:1–6) Sage Yajnavalkya reveals the essence of karma sannyasa to his wife Maitreyi:

Verily, it is not for the sake of the husband
that the husband is dear, but for the sake of the Self.

And it is not for the sake of the wife
that the wife is dear, but for the sake of the Self.

And it is not for the sake of the sons
that the sons are dear, but for the sake of the Self.

And it is not for the sake of cattle
that cattle are dear, but for the sake of the Self.

And it is not for the sake of the priest
that the priest is dear, but for the sake of the Self.

And it is not for the sake of the many worlds
that the many worlds are dear, but for the sake of the Self.

And it is not for the sake of the gods
that the gods are dear, but for the sake of the Self.

And it is not for the sake of the Vedas
that the Vedas are dear, but for the sake of the Self.

And it is not for the sake of the beings
that the beings are dear, but for the sake of the Self.

And it is not for the sake of the All
that the All is dear, but for the sake of the Self.

Indeed, my beloved, it is the Self that should be seen, the Self that should be heard, the Self that should be reflected upon, and the Self that should be known.

And when the Self has been seen, when the Self has been heard, when the Self has been reflected upon, and when the Self has been known, then everything is known.

Glossary

Abhyasa – regular and continuous practice over a period of time

Ahamkara – ego; awareness of existence of 'I'

Ajna chakra – sixth pranic centre or chakra, situated at the top of the spinal cord; seat of intuition; centre where guru's commands are received

Amrit – divine nectar

Anasakti – spirit of non-involvement, inner detachment.

Anubhuti – experience

Artha – material need, prosperity; one of the four purusharthas

Asana – physical posture in which one is at ease and in harmony; steady and comfortable meditation posture

Ashram – place of spiritual retreat and inner growth through internal and external labour

Ashrama – stage or period of life, of which there are four according to Vedic tradition: brahmacharya, grihastha, vanaprastha and sannyasa

Atma anubhuti – experience of a deeper stage of personality which is subtler than body, mind and emotions

Atman – spirit, soul

Avatar – incarnation of God

Avidya – ignorance

Bandha – psychic lock that concentrates the flow of energy in the body at one point or plexus

Bhagavad Gita – Lord Krishna’s teachings to his disciple, Arjuna, delivered at Kurekshetra, at the commencement of Mahabharata war

Bhakta – devotee

Bhakti – intense inner devotion or love; channelling of the intellect, emotions and self towards a higher, spiritual purpose

Bhava – state of mind, feeling, love; inclination or disposition of mind

Bhoga – external attraction when the mind dwells in sense objects.

Bhrumadhya – trigger point for ajna chakra, located at the eyebrow centre

Brahmacharya – redirection of sexual energy towards spiritual and meditative experience; living in constant awareness of Brahman

Brahmacharya ashrama – first stage of life to twenty-five years of age, devoted to learning and study

Brahmavidya – knowledge of the Self

Buddhi – discerning, discriminative aspect of mind

Chitta – aspect of mind whose functions are memory, thinking, concentration, attention and enquiry

Dakshina – sacred offering

Dharma – natural role one has to play in life; duty; righteous action; one of the four purusharthas

Dhoti – unstitched length of cloth

Dhyana – meditation, constant total awareness

Diksha – initiation

Dukha – suffering

Gayatri mantra – Shakti mantra of twenty-four syllables.

Geru – earthen red powder; colour of the robes of a sannyasin

Grihastha – householder

Grihastha ashrama – second stage of life; married, householder life from twenty-five to fifty years

Guna – quality or attribute of the mind; three in number: *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattwa*

Guru – dispeller of darkness; spiritually enlightened soul, who by the grace of his own atma can dispel darkness, ignorance and illusion from the mind of a disciple

Hatha yoga – system of yoga consisting of practices for physical and mental purification

Ida nadi – major pranic channel which conducts the passive, mental force or manas shakti

Ishta devata – one's personal deity or symbol of the supreme being

Jivanmukta – a liberated soul

Jivatma – individual soul

Jnana – true knowledge; wisdom

Jnana yoga – yoga of knowledge and wisdom attained through self-analysis and investigation of abstract or speculative ideas

Jnanendriyas – the five sensory organs

Kali – aspect of maha shakti, which is the destroyer of time and annihilator of the ego

Kama – emotional need or fulfilment; one of the four purusharthas

Karma – action in the manifest and unmanifest dimension; law of cause and effect of three kinds: prarabdha, sanchit, kriyaman

Karma sannyasa – householder sannyasa; renunciation combined with duty; second stage of sannyasa initiation

Karma sannyasin – one who evolves by developing inner qualities of renunciation, surrender and detachment whilst performing worldly duties

Karma yoga – perfection in action; action performed with meditative awareness; yoga of dynamic meditation; yogic path of selfless service

Karmendriyas – five organs of action: hands, feet, tongue, excretory and reproductive organs

Kriya yoga – practices of kundalini yoga

Kriyaman karma – the effects of the deeds of the present life to be experienced in the future

Kumbhaka – internal or external retention of breath

Kundalini – vital force or latent energy residing in mool-adhara chakra, often referred to as the serpent power

Likhit japa – writing of mantra

Madhyama – intermediate; whispered

Mala – rosary made from tulsi, sandalwood, rudraksha or crystal, used as an aid in japa and meditation

Mamata – attachment

Manas – rational aspect of mind which creates thought/counter thought

Mantra – subtle sound or combination of sound vibrations used for liberating consciousness from the limitations of mundane awareness

Mantra diksha – initiation into mantra by guru

Maya – creative power; power of illusion

Moksha – liberation from the cycles of birth, death and rebirth; inner freedom; one of the four purusharthas

Mooladhara chakra – lowest psychic and pranic centre in the human body, situated in the perineum in men and the cervix in women, connected to the coccygeal plexus

Mouna – silence

Nada – psychic or eternal sound

Nada yoga – the yoga of subtle internal sound

Nadi shodhana – pranayama technique which purifies the nadis by alternate nostril breathing

Nirvikalpa samadhi – state in which the mind ceases to function and only pure consciousness remains

Nivritti – renunciation of the external world

Niyama – five observances of conduct and character; inner disciplines

Para – transcendental

Paramatma – supreme soul

Pashyanti – mental

Pingala nadi – major pranic channel which conducts the dynamic force or prana shakti

Poorna sannyasa – third stage of sannyasa initiation; complete renunciation

Prakriti – active principle of the manifest world

Prana – vital energy force

Pranayama – a series of techniques using the breath to control the flow of prana within the body; expansion of the range of vital energy

Prarabdha karma – unalterable or fixed karma

Pravritti – total involvement in the external world

Purusha – pure consciousness

Purushartha – personal effort; four areas of human endeavour to be fulfilled: artha, kama, dharma and moksha

Raja yoga – eightfold path classified by Patanjali in the Yoga Sutras

Rajas – one of the three gunas representing the dynamic, active state of mind and nature

Rama – heroic and virtuous king, seventh avatar of Vishnu; embodiment of dharma

Ramayana – epic relating the life of Lord Rama

Rishi – seer of truth; realized sage

Sadhaka – spiritual aspirant

Sadhana – spiritual practice done regularly for attainment of inner experience and self-realization

Sahajoli mudra – contraction and release of the urinary passage in the female body to stimulate swadhisthana chakra and promote brahmacharya

Sahasrara chakra – abode of superconsciousness; ‘thousand petalled lotus’; highest chakra or psychic centre which symbolizes the threshold between the psychic and spiritual realms, located at the crown of the head

Samskara – unconscious memories; past mental impressions which set up impulses and trains of thought

Sanchit karma – stored karma

Sannyasa – renunciation; dedication; from sam meaning ‘equable’, and nyasa meaning ‘trust’

Sannyasa ashrama – fourth stage of life from seventy-five years onwards; total renunciation

Satsang – gathering of spiritually minded people, in which the ideals and principals of truth are discussed; association with the wise

Sattwa – one of the three gunas; pure, unadulterated quality; state of luminosity and harmony

Shambhavi mudra – eyebrow centre gazing

Sharmaka – one who resolves to practise total virtue

Shatkarma – group of six purificatory techniques of hatha yoga

Shoonyata – voidness

Soma – a plant used by the rishis of ancient India for the purpose of spiritual awakening and spiritual immortality

Sukha – pleasure

Sukshma – subtle body

Surya namaskara – ‘salute to the sun’; series of twelve asanas for revitalizing prana

Swadhyaya – self-study, self-analysis, self-awareness

Tamas – one of the three gunas; state of inertia, dullness or ignorance

Vaikhari – audible

Vairagya – dispassion, detachment towards the inner emotions

Vajroli mudra – contraction and release of the urinary passage in the male body to stimulate swadhisthana chakra and promote brahmacharya

Vanaprastha ashrama – third stage of life from fifty to seventy-five years of age; retirement from worldly life in order to practise sadhana in relative seclusion

Vasana – seed or latent inherent desire

Vikalpa – oscillation of the mind; imagination, doubt

Vikshepa – dissipation of the mind

Vishaya bhoga – sense objects

Viveka – right understanding, higher discrimination, indirect knowledge or intuition

Yama – five restraints, disciplines or rules of conduct

Yoga Sutras – ancient authoritative text on raja yoga by Patanjali

Index

- Acceptance 23, 25–26
Action 35, 70–71, 159, 285–288
Adrenalin 100
Ashram 42, 263–268; life 48–52,
118, 264, 266, 267–268, 274
Ashramas 12–14; life 48–52
Atman 234
Attachment 3, 21, 22, 28–29,
39–42, 141, 157–158, 159,
163, 179, 183, 187, 189–191,
256
Balance, maintaining 5, 22, 66,
156, 201–202, 222–223, 225
Bhagavad Gita 3, 18, 69–71, 120,
225–226, 243–246, 280–281,
285–288
Bhakti 179–184, 185–186
Bhakti yoga 180–181, 184, 185–
186, 272
Boredom 248
Brahmacharya ashrama 12, 136,
225, 281
Brahmacharya 83, 87, 211, 213–
217
Buddhi 234–235, 236
Chastity 219
Celibacy 6, 83–88, 215
Crisis 21, 37
Children 94–97, 199, 203–212;
yoga and 208–211
Creation 125, 226–227
Christ consciousness 149
Dakshina 56
Death 37
Desires 16, 74, 116, 229–230, 282
Destiny 22, 134, 238–242, 261
Detachment 5, 27, 28, 29, 39–
42, 119, 140, 141, 155–156,
157, 163, 186, 187, 189–191,
256, 265–266, 267
Determination 23
Devotion 179–184
Dharma (see Duty)
Dhyana 170, 172
Diet 98–101
Discrimination (viveka) 35–36,
43–45
Disillusionment 21, 37, 177
Divorce 195
Dispassion (vairagya) 43
Duty (dharma) 6, 27, 28, 29, 34,
70, 75, 76
Education 207–208
Ego 245
Emotions 16, 27, 136, 184, 211,
213, 231
Equanimity 22, 71
Evolution 131–134
Experience 153–154, 160–163
Faith 106
Family 1, 4, 5, 50, 89–93, 157,
191, 195–199
Fasting 66
Future 242

- Geru 60, 156, 259, 262
 God 115, 180, 184–185, 186
 Grihastha ashrama 3, 13, 136–137, 177, 225, 273
 Gunas 136
 Guru 5, 6, 41, 67, 108, 119, 133, 198
 Guru-disciple relationship 53–57, 60–61, 62, 121–122, 150, 270–272
 Householder life 3, 34, 72, 74, 117, 118, 120, 136, 137, 138–142, 144–145, 166, 167, 168, 198, 248, 251, 256, 258, 264, 267, 268, 273, 281, 282
 Husband and wife 6, 178, 196, 197, 201
 Incarnation 131, 134, 146, 165, 233
 Initiation 5, 7, 58–61, 119, 146; mantra 119; karma sannyasa 120, 146, 149, 151–152, 153, 158, 160, 168
 Ishta devata 180
 Janaka, King 23, 72–76
 Jivatma 236
 Kali 181–182
 Karma 2, 14, 15, 25, 26, 27, 29, 31–34, 63, 124, 137, 140, 141, 147, 157, 158, 159, 229, 230, 233, 236–237, 238–239, 247–248, 256, 280
 Karma sannyasa 3–7, 15, 17, 18, 22, 23, 25, 26, 34, 37–38, 46–47, 108–109, 113, 115–116, 118, 120, 127, 139–140, 149, 151, 157, 162, 222–223, 258–259, 260, 266, 273, 277–278, 281
 Karma yoga 51–52, 70, 123, 126–127, 246, 246–248, 249
 Knowledge (jnana) 161
 Kundalini yoga 199–200
 Liberation 11, 12, 134
 Lifestyle 107, 164, 166, 205, 251, 268
 Love 41, 179, 196, 198, 199
 Mala 60, 156
 Mantra 119, 125–127, 155, 170–172
 Marriage 6, 174, 176, 177, 200–201, 202
 Marital relationship 6, 174–175
 Maya 147, 187–188
 Meat-eating 99–101
 Meditation 168–170, 174, 253–254
 Mind, transformation 143–144; stages of 144–145
 Mission 269–270
 Mouna 66, 67
 Nature (prakriti) 114–115, 215, 233–234
 Negativity 49–50, 143–144
 Nivritti 25
 Non-attachment 70, 74–76
 Non-doership 4, 120–121, 234
 Parents 79, 95–97, 203–206
 Pineal gland 210, 211
 Prakriti (see Nature)
 Pravritti 25
 Psychedelic drugs 169–170
 Procreation 77

- Purpose of life 1, 2, 35–38, 44, 113, 114, 115–116, 149, 166, 192
- Purusha 115
- Purushartha 224
- Rajas 145
- Rama 226–227, 228
- Ramakrishna 181–183
- Reincarnation 134–135
- Religion 11, 12, 36, 46–47, 130–131
- Renunciation 25, 26, 120, 152, 157, 228–232, 285–288
- Retirement 3
- Rishi 166, 168, 172
- Sadhana 51, 62–67, 92, 93, 154–155, 252
- Samskara 7, 32–33, 142–143, 203, 236–237
- Sankalpa 282
- Sannyasa 2, 116, 119, 166, 167, 274, 275, 276–277, 281; tantric 167, 173
- Sannyasa ashrama 14, 118
- Satsang 64, 238
- Sattwa 144–145
- Science 11–12
- Self-analysis 44, 69, 121, 127, 187
- Self-awareness 23, 25, 132, 138
- Self-respect 251–252
- Sex 78, 196, 198, 211–212, 219; act 79, 81–82; diet and 98–99; incompatibility 98–99; suppression 79–80, 85; transformation 80, 81, 85–86, 87–88, 173–174, 215, 216–217, 217–218, 219; urge 79–80
- Socrates 197
- Soul, transmigration of 241–242
- Spiritual aim 192
- Spiritual evolution 2, 16, 17, 37, 116–117, 123, 131–132, 138–139, 154, 157, 162, 165, 193–194, 245, 247, 269
- Spiritual name 6, 60, 259, 260–262
- Spiritual progress 148–149, 153–154
- Spirituality 16–19, 136;
- Sublimation 80, 183, 184, 213, 215, 221, 282
- Sufi 181
- Suffering 21–22, 28–29, 92, 107, 177, 244, 245
- Sukadeva 72–76
- Suppression 137, 138
- Surrender 150–152
- Swadhyaya 69
- Tamas 145
- Tantra 167, 173, 215–216, 217–219; tantric disciples 122; tantric sannyasa 167, 168, 173
- Totapuri 182
- Transformation 105, 106, 258
- Tulsidas 183–184
- Vanaprastha ashrama 3, 13, 15, 118, 139
- Vegetarianism 100–101
- Vitamins 274
- Wealth 102–104
- Work 27–28, 70–71, 249
- Yoga 176, 199, 244; mission and 269–270
- Yoga Vashishtha 228–232

Notes



Swami Satyasangananda (Satsangi) was born in 1953, in Chandornagore (West Bengal). She experienced a series of inner awakenings from the age of twenty-two, which led her to her guru, Swami Satyananda. From 1981 onwards she travelled ceaselessly with her guru in India and overseas, and developed into a scholar with deep insight into the yogic and tantric traditions as well as modern sciences and philosophies, leading to the writing of authoritative commentaries on classical texts.

She is an efficient channel for the transmission of her guru's teachings. The establishment of Sivananda Math at Rikhia is her creation and mission, and she guides all its activities, working tirelessly to uplift the underprivileged and neglected residents of the surrounding villages. She founded Sivananda Ashram in 2004 and Rikhiapeeth in 2006, where, as the first peethadhishwari, she is dedicated to implementing Swami Sivananda's three precepts of serve, love and give.

She was initiated as a Paramahansa sannyasin in 2007 and now she is travelling globally to spread the message of yoga and seva. Embodying compassion with clear reason, Swami Satsangi is the foundation of her guru's vision.



SATYANANDA YOGA
BIHAR YOGA

Karma sannyasa is a dynamic and practical way of life, enabling the individual to develop higher awareness through life rather than away from it. The concept of karma sannyasa is to live life fully, to participate in all events externally while internally maintaining an attitude of non-doership. Explaining how closely attachment, desire and ambition govern our lives, *Karma Sannyasa* describes methods to transform these patterns and realize a happier outlook through the blossoming of spiritual awareness.

This book focuses on the guru-disciple relationship, family life and relationships, karma, self-respect and lifestyle, describing the process of realizing spirituality through everyday experiences.



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ISBN : 978-81-85787-43-5